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WAYSIDE WISDOM

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WAYSIDE WISDOM

WAYSIDE WISDOM

A BOOK FOR QUIET PEOPLE

BY

E. M. MARTIN

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TO

E. H. R. Ll.

WHO ASKED ME TO WRITE MY

"THOUGHTS ON COMMON THINGS"

193682

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Of these seventeen essays, eleven are now printed for the first time. The others,

"Wayside Wisdom,"
"Old Houses and Odd Dreams,"
"The Laying Waste of Pleasant Places,"
"A Lost Art,"
"The New Irish Peasant,"
"On Growing Old,"

appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, under the editorship of Mr. A. H. Bullen; but one, "The Laying Waste of Pleasant Places," has been rewritten for this book.

WAYSIDE WISDOM.

WAYSIDE WISDOM.

THERE is something, after all, to be said in favour of that greatly abused person, the wayside tramp. He stands as a living protest against the dull, dead level of our highly civilised and wholly conventional lives, and, even if he does nothing else, is useful as an object-lesson of indolence to an ever active world. There is a grace, even a virtue, in doing nothing, but so unaccustomed are we to its practice, still less its praise, that at first this very old truth sounds like some new thing. We live in an age when every one is clever; so clever, indeed, that by no possibility will they ever learn to be wise. We have made such excellent progress that we now begin not only where our fathers left off, but a point beyond, where even their dreams never carried them, and we look back with pity upon the past of ignorant content that was all our forebears knew of life. We are very much better off than they ever were, live more luxurious lives and are far better educated; we hear it said so often that at last

we almost grow to believe what we hear, for it is difficult to withstand the tyranny of a popular tune. We may hate the vulgar air with its meaningless catch-penny refrain, but sooner or later we whistle it with the best of them, and, what is far worse, learn to appreciate the sound of our own whistling. And so with the creeds and theories and affectations of the moment. We come upon them unawares. They peep out at us from the pages of the latest book, they stare at us boldly in the columns of the newspapers, until, too tired any longer to resist the force of opinion, we begin to wonder if there may not be some little grain of truth in these new gospels that are being shouted into our ears by some millions of voices.

Every age has its characteristic, an ideal before whose shrine it willingly burns as incense the hopes, dreams and beliefs of all the ages that have gone before; and the ideal of to-day, to which we must make either voluntary or involuntary sacrifice, is uniformity. At whatever cost we must all be cut out after the same pattern, a good enough pattern, perhaps, but through its very monotony threatening to weary the eye and deaden the heart. We must all—the fit and the unfit, the wise and the foolish, the weak and the strong—receive a uniform training; be taught the

arts for which we have neither taste nor talent; be drilled to the rigidity of soldiers, and be forced to learn the beginnings of those sciences for which we have neither aptitude nor possible future need, just because it is the theory of to-day that nature made a great mistake in not turning each one of us out as the exact counterpart of the other. So this wise, sensible, highly civilised age of ours intends to rectify the mistake and teach Mother Nature a lesson, and never stops to ask whether she is not rather old, by this time, to begin going to school.

It will be a dull world when we have all learned, at infinite pains, to think alike, and in consequence to speak alike and act alike; a most excellent world according to the judgment of a military commander or a school inspector, but not one that it will be good for poets, dreamers, vagabonds, or any such ill-regulated people to live in. No doubt all our thinking will be done for us, much in the same way that our patent foods are already digested before they are given to us, and the result will be a set of well-regulated, well-mannered machines with those two dangerous organs, brain and stomach, left out. Already we are in a fair way to attain to this ideal. The average man and woman do not even try to think, for they greatly prefer that some one else should

think for them; and so newspapers direct our politics; magazines and advertisement columns tell us what books to read and what to say about them when read; societies teach us the way to be charitable; lecturers instruct us how to improve and preserve our health and strength; agencies advise us when, where and how to travel. There is no need, to-day, for any one to remain ignorant on any single subject, unless indeed it be the mystery of life itself that still eludes us, because we have neither the time nor the leisure to try and understand it.

The wisest men in all ages, from the Golden to the Electric, have been those who have learned to think for themselves; who as children made their own playthings, and when they grew older created their own worlds and were content to live in them. They may, as we reckon, have had but few advantages; but they have studied deeply in those two great books that are well within the reach of all of us—the round world and the human heart: books unhappily neglected to-day by many writers and more readers. And yet an inexhaustible store of learning is to be found in those pages that, however often we may turn them, can never wear out, and whose last chapters we shall never read.

There is a certain kind of knowledge (withheld

from learned scholars but possessed by many ignorant men) that may be called the wisdom of the wayside, and of this wisdom some scraps have floated down to us in the shape of homely proverbs; proverbs contemptuously described by some unknown author of a superior turn of mind as "milestones on the pathway of fools". I must own to an affection, even a weakness, for proverbs. Irritating in their sound common-sense, exasperating in their undeniable truth, self-assertive in their very brevity, they are yet of infinite value as the result of experience and of first-hand observation made when nations and peoples alike were in the early freshness of their springtime. Every proverb when first spoken must have confounded the hearers with its solid weight of truth, and we can easily imagine the respectful silence that followed hard upon its utterance.

The East has been more peculiarly the birthland of the proverb; of those picturesque odds and ends of wisdom that can be as readily stored in a man's memory as the camels store water for their long, lonely marches across the desert. Where life is leisured, stately and yet simple withal, men have time for meditation; they can look into their own souls and try to learn something of the mystery of the journey from silence to silence

that we call life; and so these Eastern proverbs have, for the most part, an unfamiliar sound to our Western ears. To watch the sun, the moon and the stars; to listen to the wind; to hear nature whispering in that still, small voice of hers through the warm scent of the earth, the trembling of leaves, or the lapping of water, is a better education than can be had from all the books that ever were written or ever will be written. And it is to the wanderer by the wayside that this wisdom is given; to the hewers of wood and drawers of water, to the beggar with his bowl, and to the holy men who spend their lives in the prayer and meditation that we, in our ignorance, call idleness.

In all probability the great Solomon made but few, if any, of the proverbs that bear his name; they were the words of the common people caught up and carried into the royal palace, for the dust of the wayside had opened their eyes to the truths of life that are hidden from mighty kings and councillors to be shown to the vagabond and the outcast. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man," was surely first said by some dust-stained and weary traveller resting by the side of a chance companion under the shadow of a mighty rock after they had drunk their fill from a pool the sun had forgotten to dry; for in

these rare moments of unexpected ease a man will open out his heart to the stranger and tell the thoughts he would fain hide even from the mother that bore him. The words have about them the true ring of the wisdom of the wayside; they were never spoken within the walls of palaces, where water must be fetched for the king's use though all the world lie dying of thirst, and where the secrets of men's hearts are kept close.

"When the darkness falls a man can see to read in his own heart, but when the morning comes his eyes are blinded," says an Eastern proverb that would make excellent food for mystics, but that we find hard of understanding. For darkness, we are now taught, is the seed and root of all evil; out of it no good thing can come, and only when we have driven it away with brilliant lamp-light will the streets of our great cities be kept pure and clean. So far have we wandered from wisdom that we treat our best friend as an enemy, and dread the darkness that shall cover our heads and teach us the wonders and mysteries we may not learn in the brightness of the morning.

In the East the spirit of the wayside is still alive, but here it only lingers as a spirit of the past. The conditions of life have changed, and it has become a shame, even if not an actual crime,

for any one to go to bed with the sky for a canopy and the moon and stars for candles. The gipsy and the vagrant, who asked for nothing better than to be left alone, are being pursued with a vigour and energy worthy of a better cause. They sin against the law of uniformity by refusing to accept the creed that teaches the blessing of labour, and so they are accounted as an ugly blot upon our prosperity and well-being. There is something strangely pathetic in the struggle these people make to resist the bounties we are anxious to thrust upon them. In France a horde of gipsies were driven from one province to another; conducted with all due ceremony across the boundary line, and then sent back again by polite officials, at their wits' ends to know what to do with them. The picturesqueness of the nomad life—the tent, the caravan, the camping-ground—interferes with the proper preaching of the gospel of work, and stains the grey of existence with its vivid colour and hint of romance. The country roads are no longer left to the dreamer or lounger; the light of flaring lamps, the braying of a motor-horn, a cloud of evil-smelling dust, stand for us, to-day, as the poetry of the wayside.

It may be true that the gipsies and their tents were of but little use to the nation; that they

represented the leisured classes, lived at the expense of honest farmers, and were always unwelcome visitors in the countryside. But if they stole from the villagers at least they gave to them again ; not only telling for a piece of silver the very same fortune that costs a golden guinea at a fashionable palmist's, but offering gifts of far greater value—quaint remedies at which science laughs, but that credulity tries, and is rewarded. Gipsy knowledge learned at first hand from the brown earth and passed on from mother to daughter as a precious heirloom, is not all made up of nonsense or pretence. We may smile at the necklace threaded from the cut stem of the deadly nightshade and worn round the baby's neck that the teeth may grow white and even, yet at worst it is but an innocent form of faith cure. There are simple remedies, too, for burns, quinsies, and other common ailments that are worth far more than the rabbit or the laying hen the gipsy man steals from the farm while the gipsy woman is trying to teach the farmer's wife the true use of the herbs and weeds that grow in the fields and hedgerows.

There would seem to be no defensible reason for this rigorous crusade against gipsies and other picturesque vagrants, save that they are active rebels against the spirit of the age, preferring their own unlettered wisdom to our laborious know-

ledge. In Maxime Gorky's fine novel, *Les Trois*, the story tells of a pious peasant who built himself a shelter of the boughs of the trees and lived as a hermit in the forest, praying for forgiveness for the sins of the people. He did no harm, but only asked to be forgotten by his little world and left in peace. But Authority would not leave him alone. He was dragged from his peaceful green cell, and, making some faint resistance, died among the ruins of his home. A very similar case occurred in one of our southern counties. An old man had made a home for himself in a wood, and there lived (with two faithful dogs for companions) feeding on nuts and roots, and earning, if I remember rightly, a small pittance by the sale of willow-woven baskets. He must have realised the best dreams of the advocates of the practice of the simple life, and it seems impossible that any person, however evilly disposed, could have ever wished to disturb the content of his solitude. But he was breaking the law. So Authority came and hacked down the thick hedge he had grown round his tiny house, levelled it to the ground, and forced the old philosopher into the Workhouse. What became of the faithful dogs is not known, and perhaps it would be as well for tender-hearted, sensitive people not to ask. It was merely a little tragedy where ignorance and stupidity came off as con-

querors, but yet a tragedy to make thoughtful men pause, and feel desperately ashamed.

But in spite of laws and Education Acts, there are still some wise people left to us; some unlearned and unlettered genius to be found on lonely farmsteads and in remote villages where the speech of the country-side has not lost all its grace and colour. The writer striving to find some new thing to say might not disdain to make use of so homely an image of the unattainable as is given in the phrase, "When the sun shines on both sides of the hedge," nor could the counsel of caution be better taught than in these two lines:—

> A hedge between,
> Keeps friendship green.

The first saying comes from the south, where the old saws for the most part breathe a spirit of lazy tolerance; the last smacks somewhat of the north, though it may well be that the advice is given to young people in all parts of the country who incline to sudden intimacies and have not the necessary experience to help them to foresee the inevitable ending. North-country wit bites keenly, and the gossips of the chimney-corners cultivate a certain rough turn of the tongue that a stranger sometimes finds disconcerting.

Give bread to the poor,
But bar the door,

would seem a contradiction to the well-known character for hospitality of which the north is justly proud, but it helps to explain the level-headedness that has made of her sons such successful men of business.

In some parts of the Midlands the tramp is generally known as the traveller; a kindly way of explaining the method of life of those wanderers of the wayside who are only guilty of the sin of loving all out-of-doors so dearly that they will never consent to turn themselves into exemplary hard-working citizens. Sometimes a man of the village or town through which the travellers pass on that unending journey of which they never tire, will fall in love with one of the women and marry her, but the experiment is rarely successful. Those who are born with the call of the swallow in their hearts can never be happy within four walls. When the spring comes the traveller's child grows restless and longs for the life of the road—for its discomforts, its privations and its sense of freedom; when the autumn comes and the leaves fall, she sits by her fire and thinks strange thoughts. Her speech is not as that of the other village women, and they look at her askance. Her children may hold her to the home that she counts as at best

but a kindly prison, but she is never happy and will hand on this same gift of restless discontent to one at least of her brood.

"Les mots allaient où allait la pensée," says old Montaigne, and so the traveller's child teaches her children the wisdom she has learned from the grandparents they have never seen, and of whom they only speak in hushed whispers because it is not well to have gipsy blood in the veins. She tells them of the things they will never know; secrets that cannot be learned save by those who have walked with the wind for a comrade and had the earth for a bedfellow. Old age is often kinder to the traveller's child than youth has been. She becomes a person of consequence in the village, a wise woman to whom all turn for help and advice, and hands down the traditions of the wayside as an heirloom to her children who, grown older too, are no longer ashamed but proud of their gipsy ancestry.

In any village where a man or woman shows unusual intelligence—intelligence unfettered and uncontrolled—a little judicious questioning will generally draw out the confession, "There's gipsy blood in me". The quaint turns of speech betray it as much as the bright eyes that are the heritage of all those whose outlook has been bounded by a wider horizon line than the narrow

walls of a homestead. It is among these people that the old sayings, superstitions and genuine folk-lore are still to be found, and long may it be before the city-trained teachers with all the array of "standards" at their backs train the children into forgetfulness of the older learning. "The poor lays his ear to the ground and learns more than the king," and the wisdom of the wayside has grown insensibly into the hearts of those who listen; the vagabond sleeping under the light of the stars and roaming the woods in solitude may know more of the true mystery and wonder of the world than the most brilliant scientist that ever lectured at the Royal Institution.

We are mighty proud of ourselves to-day: we boast of the "secrets wrested from nature," and point with a vainglorious finger to our latest triumphs and discoveries; but there is much, so much, that we do not know, and more, far more, that we have forgotten. We have driven leisure from our midst and with it peace and content from our hearts, as we are driving the gipsy and vagrant from their haunts, because we have a theory that we should all be up and doing; whether the work gives much satisfaction to any of us when it is done matters little. The old writers were wont to speak of labour as the curse of Adam; the new teachers would have us believe

it to be our only salvation ; but there are some of us who (if we dared) would cry aloud that the truth lies in the older gospel and that salvation is to be found in quiet ways rather than in the frantic rush for spoil or pleasure.

The restlessness of to-day is in itself a form of disease, and the increase of certain subtle phases of insanity is said to be closely connected with our craze for perpetual motion. Young and old alike the travel-fever has seized us, and we must go to the ends of the earth in search of happiness instead of being content to "jog on the footpath way". But the old slow ways of living gave birth to far more genius than we are likely to find in these days of restless change, and men loved their homes and countries better when only the few and fit were able to leave them.

The world never stands still. One day our boasted civilisation, with its restlessness, complications, and distorted outlook on life, will be swept away, as older and more magnificent civilisations have been swept away before it. Yet the heart of man will remain unchanged, and wayside wisdom be born again when the new travellers wander along the old roads and try vainly to reconstruct our present from the sorry relics we shall have left behind us.

OLD HOUSES AND ODD DREAMS.

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THERE is a saying in the north of England among the wise women that children born in old houses are never quite the same as those born under newer roof-trees, and, like most old sayings, it holds a certain measure of truth. For old houses (the actual bricks and timber of which they are made) exercise a curiously subtle influence upon those who live in them, as though the ghosts of former owners had not wholly given up their right of tenure, but still played the part of hosts and expected from their guests some return of old-world courtesies. Stories are often told of families who carry this practice of part ownership to the length of treating their shadowy predecessors much as they do their favourite dogs, enjoying the silent companionship while feeling no fear of the unseen presences that haunt their homes; and it is very possible that children born in such strangely overcrowded houses may well be, as the old country-

women say they are, wise children ; that is, silent, thoughtful children who are still in their play and love the twilight hours rather than the sunshine.

But not all old houses are ghost-ridden. There are some of quite respectable antiquity that have never played a part either in romance or history, but have instead merely reflected through the silent years the uneventful lives of commonplace contented people. There are a hundred such still to be found in the deserted streets of slumbrous country towns ; houses whose pedigree no one questions ; houses solidly built and still capable of resisting time, wind and weather (with a sturdy gallantry that does excellent credit to the old builders), but that yet fail either to interest or to influence us. For in order to win our love and admiration an old house must possess some individual charm ; some suggestion of possible romance, some hint of mystery.

A house is, after all, a very human thing. Made for man, it becomes in time an actual part of himself ; it is plastic enough to receive impressions in its early years, and its successive owners leave, consciously or unconsciously, the impress of their own personality upon it. But as the house grows older, its position towards those passing guests who spend either the spring, sum-

mer, autumn or winter of their lives within its four walls is changed, and, consciously or unconsciously, it leaves instead the impress of its personality upon its tenants. The old house claims their love as no other home has ever done, and out of their kindly affection for its blackened beams and sun-yellowed walls grows a tenderness for the past, a mellowing of judgment, and more of those graces that are said to be the best possessions of a ripe old age. The stone, bricks and timber, after the infinitely subtle way of so-called inanimate things, seem to impart some measure of the wisdom they have gathered in the past into the hearts of the men and women who live in daily contact with them, and there is often to be seen a dignity in the manners of the very poorest, if their dwelling be not of yesterday. They take an honest pride in the cracks and bulges in the walls, in the insecurity of the stairs, and the inconvenience of the windows ; for they have learned to see beauty in the finger-marks of time, and if the old house has taught them nothing else, this is in itself a valuable lesson.

It may be merely a fancy, but to my thinking there is something infinitely more pathetic in an old house seen in a neglected town street than in the most desolate ruins set proudly in the midst of a finely wooded landscape. I feel instinctively

the same compassion one feels for some wreck of gentility found in the cold comfort of a work-house ward, and I resent the insult of its poverty. The old house like the old body has known better days, and the one is, in all probability, as keenly sensitive to its pauper's dress as the other. But an even worse fate overtakes the house that never comes to the pauper's dress, but is renovated and restored by unskilful hands until at last it stands in all the motley of its new birth. Time-marks have been effaced, windows widened, stairs renewed, ceilings raised, and hot-water pipes run through the long galleries to warm the thin, pale blood of the new race who lack the sturdiness and strength of the older generations that lived and loved and died under the shelter of its gables when the old house was young.

All my life I have loved old houses; I was born in one, and it is my fond hope that I may die in one. For death holds no terrors for the old house; it has seen so many pass along the dusty way, and has felt too often the sudden hush of the final silence fall upon its stairways and galleries. The superstition (common enough among the country folk) that death climbs the stairs could make no appeal to those who have lived all their lives between walls of fresh bricks and mortar, but we who have felt that other steps

than ours mount, unheard, the old stairway, find it easy of belief. The common lament, "Could those walls but speak!" has always seemed to me a somewhat foolish wish, seeing that they do speak, and speak clearly and plainly, to all who have learned their mute language. But, like well-bred and well-mannered persons, old houses exercise a wise reserve, and do not take the first-comer into their confidence or whisper their stories into unsympathetic ears.

Among the houses I know that best hold the traditions of an honourable past is one in a quiet street in an ancient city. The street itself has long since fallen out of fashion; it is narrow, and wears a sadly deserted air like some neglected beauty, and is all unworthy of notice save for the low, heavily built stone archway at the farthermost end, that opens into the cobbled courtyard where stands the old house. A flight of wide stone steps leads up to the great door, which, opened, shows a similar flight in blackened oak, the number of the steps, both outside and in, being (I believe) identical. The carved banisters, the lancet window that lights the staircase, the immense thickness of the walls, all give an indescribable sense of hush and quiet, as though the stately life of the past were once more possible of realisation in this house that has surely not for-

gotten the early days of its pomp and prosperity. For here in the long oak gallery with its magnificently carved chimney-piece, the freedom of the city was presented to that luckless monarch James II., and it is easy, in the dancing firelight, to repeople the rooms and passages with ghosts —with the plumes and velvets, the ceremony and courtesy of those long-since dead and forgotten worthies. Out of the windows the king could look into the quiet garden bounded by the city wall, and no doubt, in his heart, he would envy his loyal subjects the peaceful security of their home. The storms of the Civil Wars left it untouched, and save for necessary repairs, succeeding centuries have done but little to harm it, so that it still stands as a fine example of the city home of provincial potentates in the time of the Tudors.

A beautiful old country house has, of recent years, fallen into the hands of irreverent owners, who, seeing no beauty in its mullioned windows and oak panelling, like unskilful surgeons, hacked it until they succeeded in crippling it into some semblance of their own lack of taste. I knew the house in its happier days, and one of the delights of my childhood was to be shut up alone in the large oak hall where the handles of the doors were so cunningly fashioned to imitate the carving of

the panels that it was quite possible to take hold of one or two unyielding ornaments before finding a way out of my comfortable prison. Over the chimney-piece the initials "E.R." (with a date underneath) always made a thrill pass through me as I remembered the great queen had herself honoured the old hall with her presence, and that nervous courtiers had perhaps fumbled over those very same door-handles before finding an exit for their royal mistress. I can never conjure up a vision of Elizabeth, with her pearls, her ruffs and her auburn wig, without the background of that carved oak panelling and the hidden doors.

There may be no real foundation for the belief that there is any necessary connection between old houses and odd dreams, yet it is most certainly true that people either born, or who have lived the greater part of their lives, in old houses are more peculiarly sensitive than others to the influence of dreams. But the philosophy of dreams being unfathomable, there is no possibility of agreement on a subject so few of us, confessedly, even try to understand; for as each Protestant is his own Pope, each dreamer is his own interpreter, and many and strange are the meanings that are given in all good faith to the simplest visions of the night. It is easy to understand why dreaming

of a dog or a horse should bode well to the sleeper, for they are only living up to their characters as the best friends of man, but it is not so easy to explain why to dream that you are walking through a field of ripe barley or plucking a filbert from a thickly grown hedge should presage sickness and misfortune. One of the most human touches in that most human story of country life, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, is where Joan Durbeyfield, leaving the washtub and wringing the soapsuds from her toilworn hands, consults the *Compleat-Fortune-Teller* for Tess. Though believing it to be an oracle that never fails, she is yet half afraid of its supernatural wisdom, and keeps it hidden away in the thatch of the old outhouse, for fear that its mere presence should bring trouble upon her. The *Compleat-Fortune-Teller* was, no doubt, the recognised dream-interpreter for all the country-side, and even to-day it is not only the peasantry who believe in the signs and wonders, omens and superstitions that can be constructed from the seemingly commonplace fabric of a simple dream.

Dreams have drawn a line—faint, shadowy, indistinct—across the warp and woof of history ; they have turned the scale by putting a faint heart into a great commander ; they have lost and won kingdoms ; the visions of saints have given the

world some of its most beautiful poetry, and the world of art owes much to the dreamers of dreams. "Fortune comes in sleep" has often proved a true saying; yet men and women are half ashamed to confess to a belief in anything that so nearly touches the supernatural. Ours is pre-eminently a practical age when everything is weighed in the balance; if it is not judged to be useful to mankind, it is no longer accounted desirable.

Of what use is a dream? Does any one ever profit by the warning sent in a dream? Has a dream ever really saved the dreamer from impending misfortune? Of all the thousand stories told of dreams and their fulfilment, how many are true? This is the question above all others to which it is most difficult to find an answer, for the truth is known only to the dreamer himself, and all the evidence we have, or can possibly have, is his bare and unsupported word. And faith being a virtue long since out of fashion, dreams are dismissed as phenomena we cannot be expected to take very seriously. There is something intangible and incomprehensible about them; something akin to the spirit, as distinct from the body, that lies beyond the reach of the scientist's scalpel, and is baffling as the mystery of life itself. Yet the subject has fascinated poets and thinkers

since the morning of the world, and in all probability will continue to fascinate them as long as time endures. Dreams represent the *terra incognita* of fancy into which every explorer must find his way alone and unaided, returning to tell his adventures or not as he pleases, and knowing there is no fear of vulgar competition or a crowd of followers penetrating into this land of heart's desire.

Dreams are more often indicative of a change in our spiritual life than of any sudden upheaval in our material existence; that this should be so is, indeed, a very part of their nature and essence. They represent in many cases the experiences of the soul, marking, as it were, the psychological moment in a man's life; and a dream is impressive, not necessarily because it is odd or strange, but because of the extraordinary effect it produces on the dreamer. It is to this that the *Compleat-Fortune-Teller* and books of a similar nature owe their immense popularity, for, knowing that but few of us are capable of seeing the visions that delight poets, their compilers wisely give a meaning to the night thoughts of simple men. Green hedges, fields of ripe corn, the singing of birds, the gathering of fruit, crossing clear water, seeing a dead but not forgotten face, were all interpreted as warnings or promises, and the

dreamer must needs go delicately and be prepared for speedy fulfilment of the prophecy.

Repetition, too, is held to add enormously to the value of a dream. "I dreamed three times that I was walking through a field of ripe barley, and three times that I was gathering filberts from the tree; and that means sorrow," a woman once said to me, and being shortly after left a widow, her faith in her dream was greatly strengthened, for had she not received due warning, so that sorrow did not snatch her unawares? When I was a child I used to dream the same dream over and over again until I learned to know it as well as the pictures in my favourite story-book. I thought I was taken to a strange house and left alone in a room filled with old-fashioned furniture, while on either side of the wide fireplace hung two curtains made of yellow brocade of a quaint and unusual design. A terrible sense of fear held me whenever I looked at those curtains, and I used to wake trembling and yet not knowing why I was afraid. Before I grew up I went to stay in my dream house, and found that the terrible curtains, exact as to colour and design, hid nothing more alarming than two somewhat unsightly cupboards, filled with odds and ends of lumber. But the sense of fear was amply justified, and the visit marked a distinct epoch in my life,

for in that yellow-hung room I learned my first lesson of mistrust, and lost some of the dearest of my childish illusions.

That state between sleeping and waking, when our brains seem unnaturally clear, and yet strange things happen—voices call to us, people stand by our bedside, we see shining lights and hear entrancing music—has been variously interpreted as an opening of our spiritual eyes and ears, or an unhealthy condition of the digestive organs. But whether we accept the mystical, or the prosaic and wholly unsatisfying explanation, we cannot regard this semi-somnolence as a dream. In a real dream there is no pretence of wakefulness. Our actual surroundings have vanished, and we do not miss the body lying asleep on its bed, for our dream-bodies are as real to us and as tangible as those we have left for a season. In the East, a dream is still accounted a sacred thing, as it was in the days of the Hebrew prophets, and there are, too, here in the West, scattered up and down among lonely hills and valleys, and even in the crowded streets of our great cities, mystics and thinkers who read a meaning in the visions we count as foolishness, and do not hesitate to declare that the truest wisdom comes to us in dreams.

It was to one of these I told the dream that

has troubled me of late, much as the yellow-hung room haunted my childish fancy. It is again a dream-house standing in a dream-garden, but the curious feature of this house is that, though the garden at the back and the number and arrangement of the rooms are the same, the front of the building changes. Sometimes it faces a garden, and is approached by a long carriage-drive, more often it stands in the wide street of a quiet country town; but directly I open the door, I find within everything unchanged—the square hall with the windows on either side; the wide flight of stairs with the oak gallery running along the top; the door beyond the hall facing me at the end of a long passage that leads into the garden; the sunny rooms, and the nest of bedrooms opening out of the galleries. It is a desirable house, a house it would be good to live in, and the garden is of unusual size and beauty. Great fruit-trees covered with blossom in the spring and laden with fruit in the autumn (for, like the northern king in William Morris's poem, I have seen that garden through the windows in all the four seasons) grow close to the house; grass-covered terraces slope down to rose-walks and beds of tall flowering shrubs; I know there is water though I have never seen it, and far beyond the trees and shrubs and flowers is wild moor-

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land country with a blue haze of delicate mist rising to meet the sky-line.

Outside my dream-house all is peace, inside all is cheerfulness ; unless I go up the stairs, cross the gallery, and face a curtain that hangs against the wall, when a horrible sense of fear comes over me and I tremble like a very coward. Behind the curtain are five shallow steps ; they lead to a second and shorter gallery or passage, into which three rooms open, and in spite of my fear, I force myself to go into those rooms. They are large and handsomely furnished, and their windows look out upon the garden ; there is nothing ghostly or strange about them, and I try to argue myself out of my fear. The question perplexing me is always the same. An unexpected guest has come, for whom there is no place prepared ; shall he sleep in one of these terror-haunted rooms, or must I give up my own to him and sleep there myself? At this point I awake.

"You have never seen this house except in your dreams?" my friend said at last, and I told him no, but that one day I was sure it would be my home. He agreed, adding, "I would not be in too great a hurry to find it, if I were you". There was something impressive in the manner of his speech, and I did not ask him for any further interpretation, for at last I had found the

meaning of my oft-recurring dream. In that house it may be that it has been willed I am to die. But death is a hard word; let me rather say—when at last I open the door of the house I know so well but have never seen, I shall pass through it to my final inheritance in the kingdom of dreams.

THE ADVANTAGES OF POVERTY.

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EVERY man, I take it, if he will but speak the honest truth, must needs confess he would rather by far be rich than poor; indeed, so universal is the desire for riches, that the mere attempt to say a good word for poverty almost needs an apology: like defending the outcast or praising an unpopular creed, it should only be done warily before a chosen audience of whose secret sympathy the speaker is already assured. For the disadvantages of poverty are so manifold, so convincing, that they can easily be told by the youngest child, while the advantages of wealth are so stupendous, so overwhelming, that their mere enumeration would fill a bulky volume. Thus poverty has never been a popular calling—"an odious calling," says old Robert Burton—and the number of those who have followed it of their own free will have been, in all times, but few. And even they, for the most part, were moved by the hope of an ultimate reward in a city set about with precious stones, where their tired feet

would find rest on golden pavements; surely a strange vision for shabby pilgrims! It is true, poverty has had its praises hymned by many tongues in many ages, but there has ever been a smack of insincerity about it all; as though the writers were not oversure of themselves, and so were the more anxious to impress others with the nobility of mind set high above the vulgar love of riches. "Labour not to be rich," said the Wise Man, while his father, David, before him had told how the sons of men disquiet themselves in vain, heaping up riches and knowing not who may gather them. But, instead of heeding these warning voices, we look around us at the great world, and learn far more convincing lessons from what our eyes can see therein. Wealth, it seems, has things all its own way, for it is power, omnipotence; small wonder that after looking long enough, no one, if he can possibly do otherwise, will ever consent to follow the calling of poverty.

Yet poverty has its advantages, real and not imaginary; advantages that are somewhat apt to be overlooked by the rich and underrated by the poor. When I was a child in the nursery, I remember watching a country workman try to open a locked drawer, and being greatly delighted with the bag of keys of all shapes and

sizes he had brought with him for the purpose. For they ranged from keys as big as those that unlock an ogre's castle to some small enough to fit a watch, and at last I asked him if they were all his own? Yes, they were all his, and I felt suddenly impressed with a sense of the man's importance. Locks, I knew, were made to guard hidden and precious things, so this rough workman with the blackened fingers must evidently be a person possessed of boundless wealth. In a moment of confidence, finding myself alone with him, I whispered that I myself had only one key, a very little key to fit my treasure box; and I can still see the man's kindly smile as he paused for a moment in his task to wave his hand in the air after the best manner of the village orator. "Then you are the luckiest person in all the world," he said, speaking solemnly but with a sly twinkle in his eye, "and you will always be lucky so long as you have only one. For the more keys you have the more troubles you'll have, and you may take my word for it."

I do not suppose I even attempted to dispute the authority of the proud possessor of a bagful of keys; I should most certainly not attempt to dispute it now. For though I did not know it, I was listening to the whole philosophy of life,

summed up entirely for my benefit into one short sentence—"The more keys you have, the more troubles you'll have". Truly it was a wise man who spoke with me that day!

But if in those far-distant years I ever looked forward to a future filled with the hoarding-up of riches, and the consequent accumulation of guardian keys, I grievously miscast my horoscope. Instead, it was written in the book of fate that I, at least, should never be "exceeding sorrowful" because I had great possessions, like that certain rich young man whose name has been wisely withheld from us, but who stands to us, for ever, as an object lesson of the advantages of poverty. The weight of his wealth proved too heavy a burden for his irresolute shoulders, and so he turned reluctantly from the narrow way he would fain have chosen, because he could not bring his mind to take the step that would ease him of his load. Probably he did not so greatly value the houses and land, the kine and the merchandise, as the sense of power all those good things brought with them: it was of this he could not bear to strip himself, and thus become as one of the common people.

How many of us are not in secret sympathy with him? We may not want the costly toys men gather together and call riches, but we do want

the authority that the possession of riches can give; to be called to a seat in the council of the nations and, like Peter, to hold the keys of heaven and hell. It is a very human ambition this desire of power, and possibly comes of Divine origin; for if man was made in God's own image it is surely not wonderful that he should aspire to a God-like omnipotence: that such power does not eventually bring him happiness is one of the puzzles wise people have been trying to solve for some odd thousand years or so.

But it is a puzzle that need not trouble the poor man, for the very head and forefront of the advantages of poverty is a certain careless youthfulness of mind. The rich man grows up quickly, for the world in all its beauty is lying before him and he is in eager haste to ride forth and conquer it. But the poor man is in no such hurry. The world is not for him save by right of purchase, and the payment must always be made in kind, red heart's blood coined into gold. So, accepting voluntarily the sad calling of poverty, he takes life leisurely, looking at the world with a wistful appreciation of its beauty unspoilt by any thought of envy, as an artist might look at the great baffling, mysterious pictures of the golden age of art.

It is a very good world for the rich man, and

a very good world for the poor man, too, now that he has turned his back on Hope, the wanton wench, and Ambition, the hard task-mistress, who would so gladly have helped him to make his fortune had he been so minded. All he need care for now is to escape the tragedy of the empty stomach, and as long as he has hands and can work he does not fear the future. For it is a part of the teaching of poverty to take short views of life and not to lay by for the morrow; rich people may trouble themselves about hereafter, may labour and gather into barns, but "needy Nothing, trimmed in jollity," is well content to accept each day as it comes.

Next to youthfulness of mind, I am inclined to reckon as one of the most distinctive among the many advantages of poverty the absence of all exacting sense of duty. Duty is a cold, not to say an academical, virtue that we are accustomed to see set up on high for admiring crowds to worship, and duty is emphatically and peculiarly the right and prerogative of the rich. The poor man's sole obligation is take care of himself, and if he does this no more is asked of him, or expected, or desired; on the other hand, the duties of the rich towards the State are many and heavy, and no one has any wish to rob them of their

privileges, for it is part of the price they must pay for power. Lucian, in one of the most entertaining and instructive of the *Dialogues*, makes Plato (in the guise of a game-cock) sing the praises of poverty to the cobbler Mycellus for this very same reason, saying that a poor man is spared all the terrors and anxieties the rich feel who guard their wealth at infinite cost of rest and sleep. And Lucian's story is but another version of the truth I learned, long ago, of the country locksmith—"The more keys you have, the more troubles you'll have". For wisdom moves in circles, and, having gone the round of the world, comes back again and begins her journey afresh.

There is yet another and a better reason why poverty instead of being shunned as some evil thing might sometimes rather be bade welcome, and made, in the quaint old phrase, our company-keeper. And it seems to me that it is a more convincing reason than any that have gone before it, as it is most certainly more praiseworthy. There may be some lack of courage in the wish to evade responsibilities, and more than a hint of selfishness in the determination to limit duty to the care of one's own soul and body, but it is a wise, even a beautiful desire, that makes us try to form friendships. For man is by nature a garrulous

animal, and, in spite of what Bacon has said to the contrary, often experiences a pleasant comfort in the mere sense of the near presence of his fellow-men, while half the terror of death lies in the knowledge that we must go upon our last journey in silence and alone. So, as the making and renewing of friendships counts for much in all our lives, the poor man has, over the rich man, this great and overwhelming advantage, that he can, for the most part, be absolutely sure of the sincerity of his friends.

The calling of poverty being, as I have said, universally unpopular, it naturally follows that no one who has to fight his way through the world ever willingly makes friends with those who, whether by choice or necessity, have adopted it. For if a man has made deliberate choice of poverty it means that he has thrown down the gauntlet before a world that loves riches and all that the love of riches means, and the world, even while despising him, is yet a little afraid of him: Christ was crucified not so much because He said He was the Son of God as because He preached the gospel of poverty that could find no favour in Jerusalem. But if a man is poor of necessity, it means (or so say the prudent) that he is a dangerous fellow and far better left alone, for he will certainly, one of these days, ask help from those

who have been foolish enough to make him free of their company, and, if he borrows, may not have the wherewithal to repay. So the rich, the prosperous, and the powerful, all turn their backs upon this man who is, to their thinking, a failure, because the seal of poverty is set plainly upon him.

But, for all this, the poor man is not to be pitied. As he is spared the possibility of disappointing any one's expectations, he is spared, too, the possibility of any one disappointing him. He can trust his friends, and love them, and have no doubts whatever as to the good faith of those out-at-elbows comrades who are content to sit with him awhile by the roadway and watch the eager scrambling crowds that press forward for the prizes of life. After all, what are these greatly valued prizes—wealth, fame ? high-sounding names for gilded toys and the braying of discordant trumpets, but not worth the price men are willing to pay for them. For to gain them a man must have parted with many dear illusions, sweet dreams, and all the kindlier ways of leisure ; he must never have stepped aside to help a friend, or wasted time in working, for the pure love and joy of art, on the things that are not seen, as did those long-dead workmen who built our great abbeys and churches, devoting half a lifetime to the perfecting of some delicately carved pinnacle that, since it was first

fixed in its place, has only been seen by the birds that fly about it. A successful man who has made his reputation must take heed that he live up to it, lest the fickle world forget him if his name be not kept ever before it: he must forego friendship because a prosperous man's enemies are those who, even while they sit at meat with him, envy him and plot among themselves how they may haply step into his place. Of this, poverty knows nothing, for its faithful friends are poor, too; they have no ambitions, and among them envy finds no place. "They that want little, get nothing," says the cynical proverb, and no one will ever be found to fret himself over the just division of so worthless a property. Only think, for one moment, of all that it means to be envied of no man. Envy is the vilest, the meanest, the worst of human passions, and it plays the largest share of any in tangling the threads of life. To be free of it is to have loosed a heavy burden from one's shoulders; to be able to look one's comrades in the face and know that the welcome in their eyes and on their tongues is free from all taint of insincerity. What more can any man desire? But this same peace of mind is not given unto him who has many keys and great possessions.

As I write, my dog presses her soft nose against

my knee and whines gently, for this is her hour—the dead of the early winter afternoon, when the daylight is fading and it is yet too early for candles—and while I idly pat her, I wonder whether the rich man ever gets as much joy out of his dog's companionship as the poor man does. Is it possible that the dog can be his constant, faithful, devoted friend, when it is left to other hands than its master's to feed it, and most of its time is spent with those who are hired to attend to its well-being? Does the rich man share his inmost thoughts with his dog as the poor man must needs do, when they sit down side by side and divide the meal together and the dog has the larger half? when the man is learning something of the dog's philosophy, and the dog is trying to understand those long bewildering silences, born of a sudden sense of impotent failure, that come at times to all of us. Man's best friend must find man, at times, hard to understand; a lordly, overbearing animal of most uncertain temper with an over-weening opinion of himself; an animal who must be humoured according to the best of the dog's understanding, and made much of, and loved and forgiven through it all. There is something terrible and humiliating in this faithfulness of the dog as compared with our own narrow and somewhat circumscribed virtues, and I have often

thought there may be some appalling irony to be found hidden away in that strange saying of Ecclesiastes—"Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" Who, indeed!

This faithfulness, this devotion, is to be met with in far more marked degree among the dogs who share our poverty than in those who share our wealth. Indeed it would almost seem as if the mere presence of sorrow, want or care, acted as an intelligent interpreter between the beast and the man, calling out the full sympathy of the one to the other, and it is safe to say that we never know our dogs, dear though they may be to us, nor do they know us, until they have tried to comfort us at some especial time of mourning when we were hard driven and well-nigh beaten in the fight: at that supreme moment the spirit of the man and the spirit of the beast met, and understood.

Again my dog softly whines, and at last I yield to her gentle persistence and we go out together into the sadness of the winter afternoon. The trees, bare of leaves, stand clear against the growing darkness of the sky; the thatched cottages look like lonely hayricks in the uncertain light, and the smell of the earth rises damp and cold with a hint of farewell about it.

The sun has loosed his weary team,
And left his steeds a-grazing,

and to the west the after-glow still shows vivid lines of red and orange. But the night creeps along like some evil witch, the mist rises, and there is something unutterably desolate in watching the familiar landscape slowly fade from before my eyes; so, I think as I tread the narrow path across the fields, must it seem to a man when he lies a-dying. The dog is racing over the grass, the white plume of her tail alone discovering her as she hides among the shadows, and an occasional bark is the only sound that breaks the stillness. Suddenly comes the toot of a horn, and with a loud buzz, like some angry hornet, a huge motor-car dashes along the highway, its lights shining through the hedge as it passes at terrific speed, leaving a whirl of dust behind it. For one brief moment I envy the men in the car. They are going so swiftly through the darkness of this dreary afternoon that it is impossible they should even imagine the sense of depression now hanging heavy upon me. I am walking slowly and have plenty of time for thought; they can think of nothing save the safe guidance of the car, and it is for this I envy them.

But, as I turn my face homewards, I see lying

low on the horizon line beyond the belt of firs the moon, blood-red, and magnified to three times her natural size by the veil of mist that half hides and half reveals her, and at the sight of her the sense of envy dies. She has a message to bring to me, a message of peace and content, and straightway the weight of depression leaves me, as swiftly, as suddenly, and as unaccountably as it came. I no longer envy the men in the car, for they will never pause to watch that red wonder rise, slowly, so slowly, behind the belt of firs, and shake the veil of mist from off her, as if impatient of the bandage on her eyes, that she may give her message of peace to a world of darkness. They have no time to think, and for this, I, poor fool, have been envying them, forgetting that when a man's feet are on the earth he can learn many more of its secrets than can ever the man who rushes over it on flying wheels.

I go slowly on my homeward way, for the world is wrapped in moonlight and I feel that I have much, very much, to learn. But as I go, my dog comes closer to me and puts her friendly nose in my willing hand, and I am glad of her company and grateful for her love. For of all the many advantages of poverty this gift of love, disinterested and faithful, is surely the best and the most worthy to be praised.

ON LIVING IN THE COUNTRY.

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THERE are, I think, two classes of people who are happy in the country; those who were born there and have never left it, and those who though born there have spent the best part of their years in a town, but creep back to their birthplace to "entertain the lag-end of life with quiet hours," and it is hard to tell which of these two love the country best. Those who have never left it, love it as men of a contented turn of mind love the familiar surroundings they have learned to call home, without passion, yet with infinite affection; but those who come back to it, love it with an overwhelming regret. All their lives, they say, they have longed for this moment of peace, and wonder why they waited until they had all but forgotten the sound of the speech of the earth or how softly she can whisper in the ears of those that love her. For at first it is the stillness and the loneliness of the country that strike hard upon the heart of the man who comes to it fresh from the town. The silence seems profound,

mysterious, terrifying, now it has gone from him how once he knew the notes of the birds and the voice of the winds, and listened with understanding to the half-inarticulate whisper of life that makes a long-grassed meadow early on a summer's morning as full of sound as the busiest street of a great city. After a time he will learn it all over again, learn it the better because once he knew it well; for the only tales we never forget are those we heard in our age of faith, and the man who was born in the country comes back to it when he is old with something of the repentant love of the prodigal son in his heart.

The country has always stood as a symbol or type of innocence and the city of knowledge, and so since Eve, with curious hands, first closed the gates of Paradise, it has been said that man loves the country and woman loves the town. And it may well be that every such saying holds its little grain of truth, just so much as to make it worth while to try and fit its truth in with other truths, for there is no such thing as a perfect whole, but only that semblance of unity we get in a cleverly jointed puzzle. Man being by nature a more solitary animal than woman finds silence restful and satisfying; for while in a whole generation only one woman, born within four walls, will take to the road of her own free will and pleasure, nine men

out of every ten, born within four walls, have longed in hot youth, and sometimes in sombre middle age, for the irresponsible vagabond life of the tramp. Eve first tired of the garden of splendid wonders, and I do not doubt but that it was a woman who first urged man to build cities, because she hated the solitary places as she hates them now; for it was a woman and not a man who first found out that the country was dull.

It was a great discovery, but a far greater mistake, though, maybe, the country is dull enough for those whose eyes have only been trained to distinguish the coarser of its sights and of its sounds. The test of the true country lover is the winter, the long winter of English woods and fields in the dead of the year; the winter a man knows who has never ridden to hounds or tramped with the guns; a winter void of the lust of killing that links us so nearly to the beasts of prey. Of the four seasons, winter is the mystic and the seer, and it is then the silver birch, that is the moon's tree and the tree of night, and for this was loved by Leonardo da Vinci, is in the very fulness of its beauty. I saw one set against a background of dark firs flanked with tall sentinel elms, the birch's silver bole and the interlacing of its bare branches being brought into strong relief by the green firs and the darker boughs of the elms,

so that it seemed like some strange half-human thing caught there and held captive against its will. Some garden-stuff was burning near by, and a thick dull blue smoke wrapped round the trunks of the elms and, passing behind the firs, made the painted hanging curtain of the old stage-craft. A cold winter sun was shining, and the wind had tossed pale clouds into fantastic shapes upon the blue level of the sky, a blue more delicate, less vivid than the smoke that came from the heap of dead leaves left smouldering on the garden walk. It was as though I had surprised the very spirit of the earth and the soul of the trees, for neither in the riot of summer nor in the wonderful death-tints of autumn have I ever seen so beautiful, so subtle, so enticing a blending of colour. Yet there are people who can find no beauty in the dead month, that, not without reason, stands first in the processional order of the year, because the beginning of being, like its ending, is one of the mysteries; and a man may live through a life-time of Januaries nor ever surprise the ghosts of the trees as I did on that never-to-be-forgotten morning.

In the country something is always happening, and to-day I have been to see the sheep-washing. A little stream thickly bordered with pollarded willows runs through lush meadows, and in an

orchard of dwarf apple trees, now in full blossom, hedged in with privet—the "tender privet," as some old writer has called it—the sheep were penned. Stalwart men in leggings holding long rods headed with iron prongs stand ready to catch the sheep, and so prevent them floating down the stream when they have been pushed into the water; and as I watched, I wondered why shepherds had ever been called gentle. For the men in leggings, with their shirt-sleeves rolled up showing their strong muscles, struggled almost brutally with the animals, never speaking to them or showing any sign of sympathy or understanding. They must be forced into the stream because washing makes the shearing easy, and washed wool fetches a better price in the market than unwashed wool, and the silly sheep rushed bewildered first at this rude hurdle and then at that, not knowing what was expected of them, yet all the while anxious to please their masters. The dogs tethered up near the gate showed a superior intelligence to the men by giving now and again an encouraging bark when some sheep, trying to climb the low bank, fell with the weight of the water that dripped from its heavy fleece, and had to be forced up by the iron-pronged rods. One, braver than the rest, jumped the hurdle, but he was quickly caught and punished

by an extra dipping, the children shouting and the men laughing as half-blinded, breathless, and with all his desperate courage gone, he was flung up the bank to shiver on the ground that had been churned into a muddy swamp by the patter of wet, frightened feet.

Sheep-washing, like many other things, should be seen at a distance if we would wish to keep some of the old illusions; as for me, I can never again believe in those gentle shepherds of whom the Elizabethan poets loved to sing. Some of the old jealousy of the dumb animals is still to be found in the heart of the peasant. He is the master, yet he and they both know which of the two is the wiser beast, and there is often something almost brutal even in his affection for his dog: it must work and share with him the curse of Adam, it may be the companion but seldom the friend. The baker (a white-headed man of eighty, who can sing a folk-song with the best of them, and has been the best wrestler in the county), was spokesman for the village, when he said, "I like them in their proper place," the proper place being, to his thinking, a shed at the rear of the bakehouse, where a miserable dog was fastened to a broken cart, and never, so far as I know, let loose from the chain. Yet it is but another expression of the belief that, in the

Middle Ages, judged animals in a court of law to be guilty of murder or crime and meted out the death penalty; possibly the idea of closing the prisoner's mouth that he might not speak in his own defence was to prove him one with the beasts who once, in the beginning of the world, were said to have ruled over man. But the old woman who lives in the House of Wisdom (and it was near to her home that I saw the sheep-washing) has her own way of explaining this curious jealousy. "Dogs they are wise-like, and some of us be afraid but what they know all we be saying and thinking"; adding, "But they were sent to teach us a lesson, for they be better than we."

In the towns men long ago gave up such jealousy, together with all pleasant belief in the Unseen World that, like the shadow cast by our bodies in the heat of the day, lays its mark on all around us; but in the country they live closer to the earth and have not yet forgotten the judgment of Eden. And this is why strangers coming first to the land sometimes find the people hard of understanding and barren of ideas; for in the towns men are busy gathering the ripened fruit from the tree of knowledge, while in the country they are content to know where the roots of it lie spread, and digging is harder work than gathering, as any one knows who has for choice dug a

row of potatoes instead of picking raspberries from the canes. But I am not sure that there is not more satisfaction to be found in digging than gathering, just as I believe there is more of wisdom to be learned in the solitary places than in the heart of cities. It is a different kind of wisdom; not of much use as an article of commerce or a means of getting on in the world, but of infinite value in showing us those hidden truths that stand at the back of life, and its possessors I know to be happy people. This wisdom has been called the brown bread of the earth, for whoever crumbles it in his hands holds therein the secrets of the whole world; but if he does not know this, it is better for him to stay all his life long in the towns and seek speech of those who will understand him.

Some of this brown bread has been crumbled between the hands of all the great men who have, after one way or another, ruled over their fellows; they had it from their nurses or their mothers, and though they have moulded it into some worthier shape, without it they would never have come into their kingdom. And this is more especially true of the singers and poets and makers of books, for did not the very wisest of them leave the town at the topmost of his triumph to go back to the country? From it he had drawn his strength,

and knew how much of the speech at which we wonder came from the old men who gossiped about their cottage doors on summer evenings, even as they gossip to-day, setting rare truths in rough fashion ; for, as a writer of our own time has well said, the speech of those who live in the thatched houses is of better understanding than those who live under roofs of slate. Here in the Warwickshire villages the thatched roof, warmest of all shelters in the winter, is still to be seen, and perhaps because of it those who live in the thatched houses keep a certain turn of the tongue that is lost as soon as they move in to the towns. It might be well if the commentators who blind their eyes and puzzle their brains over the different texts, and try to search out the sense of obscure passages by laborious comparison and patient research among dry-as-dust records, were to come instead into the man's own country and talk to the old people. For they would hear the same words, find the same habit of thought, and possibly read a truer meaning into many a misunderstood line. The famous harp of King Brian Boru was made from the wood of the willow, for the willow is said to be full of the mystery of sound, and any one listening to the wind among its leaves may learn the fairy music. Now the willow is one of the winter trees, and its home is

in Warwickshire, and if on a January morning you stand between the sun and a patch of pollarded willows, a wonderful thing will happen. All round you are brown bare trees, brown bare hedges, the very grass under your feet is dull with the winter's sleeping, but the willows are alive with colour. For every long, pale, witch-like finger growing out of the thick twisted trunk is red; the red that comes but once on the edge of a cloud in a whole year of sun-risings, the red glow of the trees that gives to us the sure hope of summer. "The red blood reigns in the winter's pale," in this dead month as in the spring, and so, standing on the old Clopton bridge or passing Anne Hathaway's cottage at Shottery on many a winter morning, have I seen the red blood reign, and been glad of it. For without the colour-sense life in the country would be somewhat monotonous, but with it a winter walk through hedge-bound lanes and silent woods is an unwinding of the mystery that runs through the heart of the world.

Love of the country would seem to be wholly independent of scenery and sometimes of association. I have been driven along the dullest road in all the three kingdoms, a road where on either side tilled fields stretch level as far as the eye can see, with nothing to break the desolate outlook

save here and there a gaunt, ghost-like pollarded elm. Yet the mare was stopped that I might gaze my fill on that dreary reach of landscape, over which a pale sun set half-heartedly behind a heavy bank of grey cloud, for the driver seemed to find a strange loveliness in it, and praised it as another might have praised a Hampshire pine wood, or a Surrey common of scented honey-heather, so many and various are the minds of men. I am almost inclined to believe it is the level land that is loved the best, land that has no beauty in itself, but only what it borrows from the clouds and the mists, the night and the morning. The reason Corot painted a tree as perhaps no other man has painted it was because he understood in a special sense the value of atmosphere, and this value is too often lost in the beauty-spots of the world where our eyes are so held that we miss as it were the soul of the picture. But it is not possible to miss the soul in the level country where, there being nothing to break the line of vision, the earth takes unto itself some of the characteristics of water by acting as a reflection of our moods, for water is the element that has mastery over the most of us. In these low-lying lands we are so near to the bare soil that we remember we are of kin to it, and out of this remembering comes a feeling of goodwill from

man to the earth and from the earth to man; the greatest writers and thinkers have been born in the level lands. The stranger who knows none of these things is happier among woods or mountains, but he who has relearned the speech of the earth is content with her at her barest and poorest, the very rags of her are good enough for him. But he must be alone with her. The garden city that brings the town into the country instead of trying to take the country into the town will be less tolerable to a true earth-lover than the most crowded of streets, because it is a pretence; a well-meaning pretence, no doubt, but none the less it lays the axe to the roots of solitude just as surely as does the building of the most ignoble and commercial of the great towns. And it is this impression of solitude that gives beauty to a high-hedged lane or a wide-spreading common, just as a thatched cottage standing alone, and not made vulgar by too near neighbours, has a certain dignity that is wholly lacking in a comfortable farmstead flanked with barns and out-houses and all the outward signs of wellbeing. "Far from court, far from care," says the old proverb, and content is a plant more easily cultivated in the open country than the town garden.

From my bedroom window I look out upon

a little forest of trees and they are never the same; it is one forest in the morning, another in the afternoon, and at night yet another and a still more beautiful one filled with strange magic and mystery. Very early all through the singing months I am wakened with the songs of the birds —first the robin, as he is the last at night save for the nightingale and hooting owl—and I often wonder whether I love my trees best in the spring or in the winter. A row of houses is the same all the year round, it knows no changes, and is the most monotonous of outlooks; but the trees have always something new to say, it is impossible ever to tire of the trees. If one morning I were to wake and find my forest with its colony of friendly rooks and wise owls gone, I should not want to look out of my window any more; it is a very little wood, but it holds as many pleasures for me as ever Adam found in Eden, and yet I might easily count every tree without going very deep into the science of numbers. But this is a part of the secret we learn when we crumble the brown bread of the earth between the palms of our hands; the secret children know and grown men too easily forget, the secret that holds the truth of heaven. It was said of a great landscape painter that the reason of his success was because he knew where to sit, and

if we would learn to love the country we must have a like knowledge. A man may not be the happier for knowing that in April the red deer shed their horns, and on the last day of May young stone-chats can fly, but if, like the painter, he knows where to sit, the smallest spinney is, for him, a forest, and the narrowest stream has all the beauty of the noblest river.

Once a man and a woman, who had taken toll of the years, were busy casting up accounts, as people will when they wake from their dreams and would fain find what good things their love has brought them. The man, who was grey-headed and weather-worn, said in the bitterness of his spirit, "I have given you nothing but sorrow". The woman, who was still young and beautiful, thought for a while before she answered, "You have taught me to love the country". And the answer contented him.

SOME OLD SUPERSTITIONS.

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THERE are superstitions old as the earth itself, and others still in the green of youth, and it is not so hard to tell their age as it is to tell the age of a legend or a fairy-tale, though they have no country, and, more often than not, are of doubtful pedigree. Like the house-leek they grow best on old roofs, yet are one with the swallow in their wanderings ; so that it is possible to meet with the very same superstition—in Iceland or India, in an Arab tent, or an Irish cabin—that one learned in the nursery, and has ever since kept hidden, half-shamedly, in one's heart. There is here no half-way house between faith and scepticism, for the word has as many meanings as homes, and no two people can be found in agreement as to which is the right one.

The truth of the matter is that superstition is belief of which we are ashamed, conviction for which we can give no reasonable or reasoned explanation, because it is our heritage from a

pre-existent state of being, when we judged by instinct and feeling and were content simply to know, without ever asking how or why. In that earlier state we went through many strange experiences, now wholly forgotten, though still a kind of half-memory remains to us of certain things of which we were afraid; and this is why every superstition is closely linked to a sense of fear. Now fear is the first of all definite sensations, and for some of us the last; however much, like the old French philosopher, we may long "to see the other side of the moon," we are in mortal dread as to what we may find there.

Every superstition, even the most homely, is an unconscious propitiatory offering to angry or offended gods, who live apart in worlds of mystery; and no argument, no teaching will ever uproot our faith in these childish fancies, superstition being a disease that has fixed itself in the bones and sinews of men, having an odd trick of making itself felt at the very moment the patient thinks he is cured.

The oldest of the superstitions are those of sound. They go back to the beginning of time, when man lived in a world that had been made for him, and not in a world he himself had made; and the commonest of all, that of the calling voices, is, too, undoubtedly the earliest of all. Its

home is the Desert, in whose very heart was planted the garden of Eden, and where, so says the legend, that garden is still to be found, watched by silent angels, the flash of whose swords will surely blind the daring eyes that would fain behold its imperishable beauty; for Eden has ever been the symbol of satisfied desire, and so it is said that in the Desert there is peace. But belief in the calling voices has found a home not only in the Desert but in every corner of the world, and its roots lie among those hidden mysteries that bind us, whether we will or no, to something outside knowledge or imagination. It has ever been held unwise to answer to this strange summoning, with its insistent iteration and its curious likeness to a human voice, for it is matter of common faith that a corner of the veil has been lifted; and whoever hears must close his ears and stay his breath, lest perchance he be taken against his will into the Undiscovered Country.

There is a superstition in certain parts of Ireland that these voices bode ill only to the fair-haired, who ever since the world began have been the special envy of spirits and jealous fairies, and that if a fair-haired man or woman be foolish enough to answer to the calling of their names, the devil will hold them captive for seven days

and compel them to obedience. At the end of seven days they are set free from this spiritual control, but if ever again they should be unwittingly deceived by these phantom voices, the term of service is lengthened, while a third answering gives them into his power for ever. I wonder whether in another hundred years any one will be left even in the island of smiles and of tears, where dreams have lingered long, still to hear the calling voices and to wipe out the evil of them with a prayer, or whether such belief will only then be chronicled in books by writers grown dull and heavy for lack of it. Yet we are all bound together by a common fear if not by a common faith, and the heart of the very youngest among us is heavy with tradition. Like the rising and the setting of the sun and the shining of moon and stars, the mind of man broods ever over old and often tilled ground, and the latest discoveries of to-day were doubtless worked out long ago in a handful of the diviner's shifting sand by some silent watcher on the towers of Memphis.

As early as the calling voices is the superstition of the shadow; for the shadow has always been reckoned as a part of the man himself, and in the early days of the world when his possessions were few, this mysterious second self, that grew tall with the sun's setting and died in the

darkness to be born again when the moon was at the full, was something sacred and set apart. To tread on the shadow of a great chief was in primitive times a deadly insult, and in altered form this same idea still lingers in the country-side, where it is held to be unlucky to cross the path of a newly married man when he is leaving the altar, as it is also held unlucky to cross the path of horses at the plough when the sun is shining behind them. Then men grew tired of the world of shadows, and began instead to build up that wonderful fabric of somewhat unnecessary artificial life we call civilisation. They made for themselves houses to dwell in, ships to sail in ; like children they reached out their hands to the sun and to the stars that they might learn their secrets, though men in the old times before them had been well content to worship and to wonder. As the new life grew and man became more and more a thing apart, as he lost all sense of near kinship with the beasts and the birds, and no longer understood their speech nor the voice of his brother the wind, still in his heart lay hidden this fear of the world invisible, the seed from which all superstitions grow. But it expressed itself in different ways, for it was not now the outside influences only that he must dread, but the very things he had made with

his own hands that had turned themselves into his enemies. Old as is the superstition of the death-watch, the houses had first to be built before, in the thickness of their safe-guarding walls, that ominous tapping could be heard telling out the minutes the sick man had to live; universal as is the belief in the warning of the three ghostly knocks at the door, it too belongs to the later date of civilisation, and so does the crying of homeless ghosts outside inhospitable windows.

The superstitions, and they are many, connected with fire are probably as old as that of the shadow. The telling of fortunes by the sparks that fly upward, or by the strange writings seen in the glow of the ashes, was the first beginning of the making of books. As the ashes fell, fresh characters formed themselves, until it must have seemed to the wondering eyes of those who watched the flames that here was surely a message from the spirits who had lived in the wood, and now sought a fresh incarnation in the fire that they might still watch over the fortunes of men. Plotinus says: "Unlike all material things fire is beautiful in and by itself alone, holding the rank of Form to the other elements, living aloft, the sprightliest of all bodies as very near to the unembodied, itself alone admitting no other to itself, all the others pene-

trated by it. For they take warmth, but it does not grow cold; it has colour primarily, they receive colour from it as their Form; therefore it shines and glows, as it were, by right of being Form." Perhaps because it is "very near to the unembodied" fire has ever been held to be the symbol of purity, and the fire customs that still linger in some lonely parts of the country, have less of the uncouth than most of the observances that have come down to us. In Pembrokeshire, not so many years ago, old women were to be found warming themselves by the very same fires that were kindled in welcome of their first home-coming, for the saying goes that a fire is a friend, and guarded as sacredly as lamps before a shrine these bridal fires glowed through all the working days of long lives, because the women who tended them believed that thus they kept all harm from their homes. In the north of England where the greyness of the skies has eaten into the hearts of the people, even the friendly fires are bond to death, and in some villages when the master of the house dies, no matter how cold the day, it is held a point of honour instantly to extinguish every fire as a sign of lamentation and of mourning. The roots of both these customs, there can be little doubt, go down to the old

days of fire worship. The guarding of the hearth-fire by the wife is but a survival of the priestess who waited expectant in the temple on the will of the Sun god, while the extinguishing of the fires when the head of the household dies is but an echo of the dignified protest made long ago by some ancient worshipper at the impotence or the cruelty of the god who had failed him.

There are many readings of the mysteries of the fire. If it burns on one side, it is the sure sign of a parting; if for several days in succession there is a hollow in the middle that refuses to be filled, no matter how much coal or wood be heaped upon it, the warning is for death; and so firmly rooted is this belief in the heart of the north-country peasant, that it is common enough to hear it said, "Why should we send for the doctor? What good can he do, when there has been a hole in the fire big enough to put your hand in for the last three days and more?" and as with all these remembrances of forgotten creeds, the happenings only too often justify the faith. I once asked an old woman if she really believed in all the omens, charms and warnings she was telling me about, and her answer was characteristic in its caution: "We don't know all the life there be in the world. Some things we think dead, be for all we know as live as

we." Though she did not know it, and was more than half afraid I should laugh at her as did most of her neighbours, she had grasped a great truth, and had learned it from the earth itself, for all her life had been lived in the country and she had not read many books. Now books are among the best friends a man can have, and if, as some writers tell us, they are a toil in the making, even the very poorest of them finds a welcome somewhere before it is sold as waste paper. But the people who can live without books are the wiser and the happier ; for the earth was old before man first crept upon it, and the air, says the wonder-tale of Genesis, older than the earth ; so those who live with the earth and by the earth, who have learned the meaning of the stars though they would be puzzled so much to call them by their right names, are after all the only true philosophers.

The oldest of superstitions is always willing to adapt itself to new ways of living, like sensible people who march with the times yet never lose their individuality. The moon was held sacred long before any records were kept of the great feasts made in her honour, of the strange sacrifices, the blowing of horns and the sacred dances ; yet all that is left to us of the splendours of her ritual is the belief that it

brings misfortune to see the first moon of the year, in its first quarter, through the waving branches of a tree, or through a shut window. Nothing must come between the worshipped and the worshipper ; this is the fundamental law of all religions old or new, and when the moon was acknowledged queen of the heavens and her monthly birth the signal for songs and feastings, men said she was jealous lest any should turn his heart away from her. Each tree held captive then its living nymph, so the waving branches were believed to be her arms stretched out to tempt the moon's worshippers from the true faith. To-day even the very children have learned that the moon, once loved, worshipped and held in high reverence, is nothing but a dead world ; no woodman now prays that his axe may free but not kill the imprisoned dryad ; and though there is still mystery in the silent heart of the wood and magic in the moon, all that survives for us is this belief that it will surely bring ill-luck to see her, in the early days of her birth, through the waving branches of a tree. For the shut window is but the new raiment for the old faith that held, then as now, a clear vision to be the highest, if not the only happiness, and may be it was but re-dressed for the sake of those unhappy people who live in cities, and know trees best in pictures.

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Over the birth of man as over his varying moods the moon still has power, and those born at or near the full will prosper in all their undertakings. I have never had my horoscope cast. The dullest of roads is worth the travelling if one does not know every turn and twist in the hedgerows, for there is always a chance that it may at last break into beauty, and the most monotonous of lives is worth the living so long as each coming day holds its own secret; and this is why the birth stars shall never be read for me.

The gravest superstitions are, as is most natural, those that touch the beginning and the end of life, and here it would seem we have borrowed some of the old practices only to turn them upside-down. The Egyptian, with an actual faith in the unbroken continuity of life, gave offerings of food and money to his dead that they might not go bare upon their silent journey, and the custom still survives in the birth-gifts offered to a new-born child at the first house into which it is taken after the christening. The gifts are three-fold,—a silver coin, a piece of bread, and a pinch of salt, typifying prosperity, plenty, and discernment; and there are still friendly houses where this welcome is offered, as there are still right-thinking nurses to be found who are careful to take a child up the stair, not down

when first it leaves the birth-room. In connection with this superstition, I remember a rather curious instance in a friend's family. A child was born in a low rambling house that had only a "top and a bottom with nothing between," as the country people say, and the nurse was sorely troubled. No persuasion would induce her to take the child downstairs, for she "would not be the one to bring misfortune on the innocent head," and there was no peace in that house until she at last decided to try a compromise with Fate. She was old and she was lame, but, in spite of the parents' remonstrances, she climbed into a high and somewhat unsteady oak chair with the child in her arms, and held it high above her head for the space of a full minute; it was not, she said, the same as going upstairs, but the best she could do. Whether it was her faith in the homely action, or the simple prayers she prayed, one thing at least is certain, that out of a large family the uplifted baby was the only one who could claim to have had a full measure of good fortune, and gone up rather than down in this make-shift world of ours.

The death superstitions for the most part are somewhat rough and rude, as though men hid their fear under the pretence of defiance, so as to

keep up a brave heart in the face of this strange silent foe. Yet there is a vein of poetry in the custom, still observed in many parts of England, that compels the bearers of the coffin to follow the sun, no matter how many paces it adds to their heavy journey. Many interpretations have been given of this sad pilgrimage, but I believe it to be but another variant of the sun legends, and not, as some suppose, merely an expression of pious sentiment, or a natural wish that the dead should have a full taste of sunlight before they are hidden away in the all-conquering earth. It is commonly said that education, acting as salt on a garden walk, has killed these threadbare superstitions, and with them driven unreasoning fear out of the heart of man. Maybe this is partly true of cities, where life moves quickly and we all march to one hurried tune. But when one leaves the city and its activities behind, the weeds spring up again in our garden walks, and we know it is but foolishness to try and kill anything that comes out of the earth into which we all shall soon be going. To soothe the vain man that is in us, we try and trace the old superstitions back to sun myths and earth legends, thinking by this pretence of science to cheat our own credulity, while, all the time, Fear has us by the throat, and in his hands we are but child-

ren, no wiser than those who went before us. The setting of lighted candles round the coffin was more for the frighting away of evil spirits than for the priest to see to read his prayers by, but I have heard another and a far better reason given. The spirit, it is said, is loth to leave the body, the companion of its finished journey, and stays in the death-chamber for three whole days in spite of the window left open to tempt it to its first lonely flight; and the candles are lighted that the soul may look upon the familiar face to know and claim its own body again, at the final resurrection. There is something real and human in the very spirituality of this fancy that touched the imagination of Blake the painter, himself more spirit than man, and made him show us, in one of the most beautiful of his drawings, the tenderness of this parting of the body and the soul. Not seldom Art has dealt grotesquely with death, as have most of the legends and superstitions; but now and again, as it was to Blake, a clearer vision is granted alike to the makers of legends and painters of pictures, and then we learn that deep in the heart of man may sometimes be found hidden an image of the Face of God.

The history of superstitions, like the making of books, is without end; for as man created his

own world and his possessions multiplied, he consecrated new offerings to the gods he still believed in though he denied them. Even a common pin has its power of luck-bringing or luck-losing. The steel pin, as every child knows, is but of yesterday, but belief in the mysterious powers that can bind or loose, curse or bless, is old as the foolish heart of man. There is one superstition that has always seemed to me more beautiful and more worthy of reverence than any other, and I will write it down here so that if any one reads this page of the book, he may learn the secret of happiness: "there is one hour in every day when whatever you wish will be granted, but no one knows what that hour will be, it is all a chance if we ever come upon it". And if this tale be true (and the longer we live the more willing we are to believe in wonders) it is easy to understand the growth of the fairy-tale, where the goose-girl turned into a princess, the cobbler into a king, the fool became the Wise Man and made the books that gave laws unto the people. Every one of them, goose-girl, cobbler, and fool, had found their fortunate hour, stumbling carelessly upon it as the poet stumbles upon the song that is to live for ever or the philosopher on the hidden truth. But most of us miss it all our lives, having been gifted only with the

talent of failure, a talent that makes us of no account in the eyes of clever successful people. Still, I believe there is a hope, when the end comes, and the spirit that is in us waits to say good-bye to its friend the body, we too may have found our fortunate hour.

THE SMOKE OF CITIES.

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In the beginning, men set their dwellings close together for the sake of company, as certain wild animals move in herds, not for any love they bear each to other, but that, in face of a common enemy, they may show a united front. Then it became a matter of convenience, for man's ambition caused him to devise the cunning law of barter and exchange that was to grow into the crooked complicated science we call commerce. At last something better prevailed, and men learned to think of the rude camp-fires as a symbol of the welcome awaiting them when they came back from the day's hunting or the day's marching, or more often the day's fighting, and all the hundred hardships they knew as life. From out the common light of the camp-fire came the hearth-stone, and from the hearth-stone grew the separate roof-tree and the separate tent, thus symbolising the life of the family as distinct from the life of the wandering tribes. It was so the tale of cities began, and the same

instinct that forced the savage Northmen into a circle of companionship, draws men to-day from the lone places of the earth into the warmth and noise and riot of the life of cities. Still the haze of smoke from close-set chimneys seems to promise as sure a welcome as the light of the camp-fires did to those earlier travellers who came from out the dark woods, the bogs and the silence of the marshlands, so that men leave gladly the peace and quiet of the country-side when they hear, tuned in many keys, the voice of the city calling to them to come and mingle with her crowds and taste the fulness of life it is hers, and hers alone, to give.

The call of the city is the strongest in all the whole world save two, the call of the sea and of the wild untrodden lands, and of these two the sea cries loudest, for many more ears hear it. I knew a lad who had lived all his life as far from the coast as it is possible to find oneself in England. His father was a gardener, and wanted his son to spend, as he himself had done, all his days between the high brick walls of old fruit gardens. But the sea had cried to him, though how or why would be hard to tell. He had never seen it save in pictures, had never heard sailors' tales of adventure in strange lands or watched the sailing of great ships upon broad

rivers; he lived in a pastoral country, and his few holidays had been spent in the centre of a busy manufacturing town. Yet across the green level land came the whisper of the sea to fill his heart with the longing of her and stop his ears with the sound of her, until at last it grew so strong that the father heard it too, and knew he must let her have his son. Nor did the sea disappoint this young lover who had known the beauty of her voice but never seen the greater beauty of her changing face, for a better sailor never worked a ship than the lad who left the high-walled green gardens for the waste of grey waters.

Men, for the most part, are drawn to the towns through lack of imagination. They have lost that most beautiful art of all, the art of creating a world for themselves, and want to find one ready-made to their hands; they have tired of their own company and must needs rub shoulders and change speech with strangers. What to the wise man is the evil of the city is to them its charm, for once in it, little by little the finer edges of their individuality become blurred and they grow wonderfully alike each to other. The vastness of the city, the pitilessness of the city where life rushes on with never a moment's breathing-space, and with seemingly

no desire save to increase and multiply the burden of stone and brick that cumbers the earth, all this fret and tumult chokes the soul in a man even if it does not hinder the growth of his body; and so it is that in the city are to be found fewer dreamers, fewer visionaries, fewer believers in unseen worlds, than in the untroubled country.

It was not always so. The city of the Middle Ages—grave, dignified, with the churches, religious houses and University for its centre, and the high walls of defence set round about it to check all undue growth—was an intellectual and spiritual rather than a commercial city; it was something that does not exist to-day. For now, wherever there is intellectual or spiritual energy there is a yet further fiercer energy overlapping and encircling it; a greed for money-making and for pleasure-getting, a forcefulness of life that overrides all sense of beauty, making men content to live in the midst of unlovely surroundings, if only so be they are well-drained and fulfil all the demands of scientific sanitation. Nowhere is the sense of beauty so easily lost as in a commercial town, and it was for this an English painter of the last century bitterly resented his birthplace, saying, strange though this may sound to us, he had never known beauty

until he came to London. For all the great capitals of the world, as distinct from other towns, are still filled with some of the old spirit of romance. They are the very roots of the nations; to them has come all the best the country can give, from out them have gone the men who made its greatness, for the story of the capital is the story of the people. Here were written the laws that are found in the statute books; here kings were crowned and uncrowned; here, in those great moments without which no nation can have strength, the people gathered together to speak as with one voice, when the rulers had been silenced.

Since to the poet of Patmos was granted the vision of a city decked as a bride for her bridegroom, to the imagination of the peasant the town has always been a token of fulfilment; of something solid and tangible, as distinct and apart from the dreams that come to men who live under cover of the sky and whose eyes are cheated with the mists of the morning. The poet told to a nation of husbandmen of the glories of a great and strange city set within high walls through which flowed a wonderful river of mystery and of life, and though, maybe, we have, most of us, lost faith in any possible

realisation of John's vision, it still stands as one of those vain images of human hope and longing that have taken shape out of man's passionate desire for happiness.

The city is the symbol of youth as surely as it is the goal of its desires. Middle age begins to weary of the crowds, and the voices in the streets, because it knows all they have to say, and that they can bring no new message to tired ears; old age will have none of them; but youth loves the struggle, the strain, the stress, and longs to be in the thick of the fighting, and the city ever draws the young men to it. "Come to me and I will make you famous, make you rich, make you a leader of men," she cries, and straightway they arise and come, lured by the pictures she paints on the smoke-haze that first tells eager travellers of the nearness of her presence; and every picture is different as every city is different. I suppose since Plato planned the ideal city, we have each of us either dreamed of a new, or deified an old, forming our own laws, and re-arranging life to suit our fancied moral code; but it is not so that real cities are made. They grow slowly, like the great trees in ancient forests, adding ring to ring, and it is through these same rings or traditions they are made famous or infamous. Sometimes they cease to grow and

become merely monuments—grave, dignified, like those wonderful cities of the Middle Ages, having left all activity of life behind them, and even more beautiful in their decay than in their hot youth.

But others, while never loosening their hold on to-day, yet live upon their yesterdays in the hearts of those who love and know them best. No city barren of traditions has ever captured the imaginations of men ; and however unwieldy, however new, however unlovely London may come to be, she will still be the London of Chaucer and of Shakespeare, the London of narrow streets, of timbered houses, of wooded gardens, and of the famous bridge that once set the whole world a-gaping. It is for this we love her, and not for her wealth, her commerce, or her new buildings, however fine they may be. Paris, for the student and the dreamer, is not the city risen as by some curious magic from the ruins made by the German guns, but the Paris of vagabond Villon, of René the necromancer, and of a world that came at last to an end with the red dance of Revolution. Of all the famous cities never a one has been so dearly loved by the sons of her adoption as Paris, and for them even the poorest of her streets is hung about with glamour. She is the enchantress, the very courtesan of

capitals who welcomes all alike and makes believe she has no eyes, no ears save for these new lovers, until, having taken all, she straightway turns her inconstant face from them.

I well remember my first sight of Paris. It was a dull wet muggy November afternoon, the streets through which I drove were as insignificant as those that lie round King's Cross railway station, and I looked in vain for the city of which I had dreamed. The house where I stayed was near the walls, and behind it were small gardens, once beautiful, but ill-kept now and desolate. From my window I could see an armless statue stained by wind and weather; some nymph who had strayed into this deserted French garden in its time of roses, and saw herself, like the woman Villon has made immortal, growing each day less beautiful, less desirable, until at last she had become nothing but a mark for the children of the concierge to pelt with mud and with stones in their idle hours. And though I grew to love Paris as I shall not love any other city, I can never forget the weed-grown garden and the sad-faced image that seemed to be a symbol of the city's life. For here is no room for things out-worn, for the old, the foolish, or the feeble. We must either work or enjoy, must spend or be spent—this is the first law of all life lived in

common; when we can work no more we may creep away and hide ourselves in the country, and listen in our loneliness to the whisper of the earth that is deadened by the clamour of men's voices as the earth itself is choked and buried under the weight of the stones and bricks and mortar out of which we build our cities.

This truth is shown to us even more clearly in the new world than it is possible for it to be in the old. An American town that has not done growing, leaves no dim space for romance, but explains its existence in every block and street as blatantly as it vaunts its nostrums on every hoarding. It has been built because it was wanted, and so, for that matter, were built all the towns that have gone before it or will follow after. But it is not content with this. There is an art to-day more practised than any other art, there is an ideal to-day more worshipped than any other ideal, and it is here in these new towns of the New World that this art has reached perfection and this ideal has become reality. The name of the art is money-making, and of the ideal money-spending and, in rarer cases, money-hoarding. For this towns are built and men and women crowd into them, and herd together not for any love they bear each to other but that they may buy and sell, make unrighteous profits and

control the markets of the world. We do not to-day build mighty cathedrals, or even if we do there is something lacking, something unreal, as though our want of faith had robbed our plans of true nobility and spoiled the very mortar of its strength. Those builders of the age of faith, for whom the vision of a city not made with hands was no mere lyrical ecstasy but a sober fact, who could without any haunting doubt have drawn out an exact ground-plan of its many mansions, were of necessity far better workmen than the men trained in our technical schools; for the workman gains as much from his work as his work gains from him, and if men are set to copy lifeless or ignoble designs, so surely will their minds finally narrow to a like ignobility. But perhaps it is because all other buildings are to-day of equal, if not of greater importance than the churches, that we have lost the power of making them beautiful, for in all that affects our vision or sense of harmony we are ruled by the comparison of outward things. In the old cities the shops and warehouses of the merchantmen were dark, low and insignificant, and even the houses of the great nobles could not compare in dignity or beauty with the church that was the city's centre, heart and core.

I walked once with a young girl on the terrace at Stratford-on-Avon, on a fresh green scented April morning, and what struck her most was not the beauty of the river or the silent churchyard, but the great size of the church—"What need had so small a town of so large a church?" It would have done just as well, she thought, with one several sizes smaller. She could not imagine, still less understand, the spirit of an age that built for reverence and the love of God, nor could she divine, still less discern, that those empty corners and long aisles were left that they might be peopled not by men alone, but angels and spirits and heavenly presences. For she had been taught to consider men and things only in relation to the one art she understood, and so it seemed to her a wanton waste of labour to build for a little town this large church by the water's edge. It could seldom, if ever, have been filled, she said, and what is not useful is unworthy, in the newer gospels of this age of unfaith alike in things beautiful and things invisible. If this young girl had to build a city, I think she would make of it an easy place to work in, a difficult place to dream in, and an impossible place to pray in, for there would be no empty churches or quiet corners; but I do not doubt that it would be a clean, well-ordered, well-drained and well-governed city,

barren of nothing save those intangible substances, silence and mystery.

There seems to be a vague notion afloat that the needs of man both spiritual and physical can be tabulated and worked out like a sum in arithmetic; that what is good for one of us is equally good for all; and we speak of a life lived in common, as of a noble ideal. We say, and say truly, that the townsfolk are less full of conceit, less sure of the value of their own opinions than those who live in the country, and whose wit needs must grow rusty because it is not rubbed daily against the razor-strop of other and possibly keener intellects; that as water finds its own level, the man who lives in the heart of a city is better able to judge the right and wrong of all the questions that vex us than is the wanderer by the wayside, whose wisdom, if he have any, is of his own seeking and not of other men's finding. But I do not know there is any special virtue in doubting the worth of one's own opinion, or that it is not sometimes better to make an honest error than to join with the unthinking crowd in stating an easily recognisable truth and feel a foolish satisfaction when we hear ourselves thus shouting in chorus. A man's deliberate beliefs are, or should be, a very part of himself. They have grown with his growth, and

without them he would be nothing, for he has quarried them out of the rugged years; they are the most valuable of all his possessions, the ones he can most ill afford to part with; and to hold by them is no common vanity but a wholesome self-respect, and to deny them is weakness, or a form of mental indolence. We all begin life with inherited or instructed beliefs as we all begin by wearing clothes that have been chosen for us; but after a time we choose our own clothes and, if we think at all, make our own creeds. They may be wise or foolish, valuable or of little worth; it is of small moment so long as they are our very own, flesh and bone of the self we are slowly, painfully learning to know.

It is well to see the great cities of the world, and to live for a while in one or other of them, if only we make no mistake as to the exact hour when we should leave it. And the time to leave is on the morning when we wake up to find the town has all of a sudden grown hateful to us; we feel we have given to it of our best, and taken from it of its best, and the hour of parting has come. The voices in the streets seem now to be merely a vulgar hubbub, the crowds only hustle us, and we wonder why men ever consent to live in these great dreary prison-houses when outside

there are still to be found green fields, quiet waters and a silent world. Yet we loved the city once, loved her for the very things we now find intolerable, and are half-ashamed of ourselves for our inconstancy (as a man is when he first begins to tire of the mistress to whom he has dedicated his love songs), until we remember she has had the best of our youth and has no just cause for reproach if we leave her to other and younger lovers. After a time the smoke of the city ceases to invigorate, and instead deadens our senses, making us dull and heavy, and we learn to walk with the crowd, and speak with the crowd, and worst of all think with the crowd; then we must turn our backs and say good-bye. But we shall not forget that once for us the smoke of the city was painted purple, red and gold, and we shall remember, and be glad of it, that so will it always look to those who come to it full of the hope, the belief, and the splendid vanity of youth.

THE LAYING WASTE OF PLEASANT PLACES.

THE LAYING WASTE OF PLEASANT PLACES.

In the fairy tales that passed for history in the world's childhood an important part was always played by the dragon, a scaly beast with flaming eyes and poisonous breath whose favourite meat was the king's daughter; and though the details of his slaying vary from the bold attack of England's patron saint to the subtler subterfuge of more wily knights, the record of the evil that he did is ever the same: "He laid waste the whole of the country-side so that no green thing could grow thereon." Isaiah knew something of the ways of these winged beasts who only live for as now on minted coin or in heraldic device, but it was not of the dragon he was thinking when he wrote, with that touch of the picturesque that helps to make of the Hebrew prophets such very human reading, "Our pleasant things are laid waste". The waste-layers of his day were men, and the pleasant things the great cities with their outer ring of gardens—those wonder-

ful Eastern gardens, hanging as from the sky, that haunt our imagination with the brightness of their colours and the heavy sweetness of their strange scents, gardens that he had known well and loved much, beautiful gardens where Solomon's "fair one" stole down in the freshness of the morning to seek for the Beloved.

Of late years the waste-layer has been busy among us, and has gone to work with a good will aided by a foolish phrase. Though the English people are not an imaginative race, and their ideals but all too seldom take spiritual or intangible shape, a turn of speech—often but half understood—can stir them to instant action; and so it is a phrase that has helped to lay waste our pleasant places. I do not know who first called our public parks and pleasure-grounds the "lungs of the city"; but whoever it was did thereby to great cities most grievous harm. For the waste-layers caught at the word as eagerly as a child catches at a ball, making it their ready excuse for cutting down, rooting up, and building over the old city gardens. If the city were left its lungs, they argued, it had all that was needful for health; a park, dropped as by magic into the midst of its crowded streets, squares, courts and alleys, was held to be breathing-space sufficient for the needs of some odd

millions of dust-choked, smoke-dried men and women. It would seem impossible to imagine a more foolish notion, yet the people were driven by the phrase-maker as lightly as the wild birds by O'Driscol's song, and watched their wealth being taken from them with never so much as a word of timely protest. The "lungs of the city" remain, but the little gardens that were at once its joy and its salvation are being swallowed up one by one to make way for the great blocks of tall ugly buildings where men and women are content to live as in the days before Prometheus, "ants in the sunless depths of caverns".

The ideal city is the beautiful city; and in spite of all that a Board of Works, Ecclesiastical Commissioners, Urban Councils, Corporations and Building Societies may say, the beautiful city is, too, the healthy city and the desirable city. It is a city of low-roofed houses each with its garden at its back, a garden no matter how small so long as it holds a plot of green grass and a shady tree. For these are a part of every man's heritage, his share of mother earth's broad bosom, and these he should surely find in the little garden that is all his own. The old builders and makers knew this as they knew many another wise rule of living we have

forgotten, and in some of our ancient cities grey with years and filled with quiet dreams are gardens still to be found to show us how beautiful was the original design of those unknown forgotten men. But time, that like death "changes pleasant things," has turned our builders, architects, even our very governors who write their will on the Statute Books, into enemies bent on destruction; the land-hunger is with them, and every green patch of earth has become hateful in their sight; it is a waste of valuable space and must be built upon.

It is true that in the front of a small house in town or city a garden is waste space. It makes but little either for health or happiness, for there is not even the suggestion of solitude or seclusion, nor any possible pretence of being in the country. But at the back of the house the little grass-grown garden with its shady trees can be a memory of Eden. Outside, the house may look very like its neighbours in the dull or busy street; once inside, the garden makes its presence known with all the charm of a sudden surprise. From the windows town-tired eyes may rest contentedly on something glad and green; about the high wall creepers cling, hiding its ugliness, and the near coming of the spring is felt here as truly as in lonely valleys or

on wooded hills. The actual size of the garden does not matter, for the feet that pace it have a measure all their own, and we do not need the Japanese (accomplished artists though they be in the art of seeing much in little) to teach us how we may find the whole round world and all its wonders as readily in a little garden as in a big one. I am writing this in a little garden bound in by high thick-set privet hedges through which my neighbours' voices come from time to time in a subdued murmur like the sound of sleepy autumn bees. Two shapely plum-trees grow out of the lush grass, and their close-leaved branches meeting overhead make my green shade; and I am not sure but that this little garden has not given me more of happiness than far finer gardens I have known, filled with far rarer flowers. If it were divided in half and these trees cut down there would be just room enough to build a small house where an artisan and his family might live; and I do not doubt the Socialist preacher would tell me that if I were a good citizen I should think this a right and a wise thing to do. But I know it would be both wrong and unwise, for neither the artisan nor I would then have a garden worthy the name; and while there are still many bare places where a small house may be built, it will take many

years of a man's life before he can grow trees in his garden under which he may sit in sweet content. Without trees there can be no true garden joys, and it was because the people of the older and wiser generations knew this that their gardens had orchards, not for the sake of the fruit (for wall-grown fruit ripens best) but because trees suggest solitude; and unless a garden can give in ever so small a degree this indefinable charm, it has failed of its purpose, and may as well be given over to the waste-layers.

The little garden at the back of the city house will soon be nothing but a memory, and only live for us in books and pictures. It is possible, though by no means easy, to forgive the destruction of beautiful old buildings if it can be proved they are to make way for something that shall be of greater use to a greater number of people. They have had their day, served their purpose; and though it is hard to part with them it is on the whole a less heart-breaking experience than to watch them put to the shame and indignity of the reconstruction that goes by the name of restoration. But it is not possible to forgive the dragon who greedily swallows up fields and trees, laying the land waste so that no green thing can grow thereon. There is too much to forgive. First of all we have had, with Isaiah, to

lament the wanton destruction of the ring of gardens that hedged our cities round and made them beautiful. The houses half-hidden among orchards, that used to make the roadways to London in springtime a very vision of delight, have nearly all vanished: Fulham, Dulwich, Brixton, Clapham, Putney, even hilly Hampstead are but pale ghosts of their former selves, and still the bricks and the mortar eat their way along until these pleasant places will soon be all but forgotten. If Gainsborough could come back again to haunt the river-side, where on the city banks would he now find the willows and wide-leaved docks that, as the easy gossip John Thomas Smith has told us, "afford the Wynants and Cuyp-like effects to the foregrounds of his rich and glowing landscapes"? Himself an artist, Smith writes—with a ready eye for colour and form—of the boat-builders' sheds, the wooden steps from the bank, the floating timber, the Vauxhall and Battersea windmills, the time-coloured tiles of the cart-sheds set against a background of flowering orchards. Yet in his day too the waste-layer was busy, though it was not then reckoned a crime to let trees grow tall and fields stand empty to the sun.

But it is not London alone that has suffered. Once on Surrey hills could peace and solitude be

found ; now the gorse and the common lands are being parcelled out in building lots, and soon the bees will have to seek for their honey-heather in some county farther away from growing, spreading London town. It is true that Redlands Wood, Wootton, Friday Street, are still left unspoiled by the hands of the builder ; but for how long a time? Houses have come even upon Holmwood Common and for the next generation it may well be, as Hindhead is for us, nothing but a little villa town. Hampshire too is losing its silence and its woods; trees fall, hedges are broken down, houses and streets take their place. Portsmouth, the home of gallant ships, was once as much a country as a seaport town, and, looking towards Fratton from Eastney, the sails of a windmill may still be seen rising out of a network of roofs. The effect is curious, almost painful, as though some wild thing were caught and caged among the bricks and mortar ; but there are men and women alive to-day who tell me they remember when this windmill stood lonely on the gorse-grown common, its back towards the sea, and the rarest of the wild flowers grew at its feet where now narrow streets of dingy houses run up to the old mill door. With the pond by its side, set amongst trees and shrubs, the windmill was a favourite meeting-place for people who lived quiet

lives in the low-roofed white-painted cottages that stood on the edge of the gorse-land where now the tram-lines run flanked by tall many-windowed houses. There is a picture hanging in Eastney Barracks of this windmill when its feet were still set in the country, but the old people who remember say that the common was more beautiful than the artist has made it. And perhaps they are right; for no picture can give the morning freshness or evening sadness of the untilled earth. Still for those of us who have only seen the arid, dusty, sun-baked stretch of trodden grass known now as Southsea Common the picture has at least this value; it can show what may be done, when man has a mind to it, in the evil ways of destruction. All that is left to Portsmouth of her lost loveliness are a few fields and houses at Milton, once a typical Hampshire village of thatched cottages and abundant orchards. The Workhouse, Prison and Asylum stand gaunt to-day where once the wide fields stretched to the church and the farmhouse that now, hedged in with a clamour of dreary, ignoble streets, look like a coloured fragment torn from some old surveying map to show that here was once the fertile, smiling country.

I only write of the places I know, but it is common talk on the wayside that the dragon

has spread his devastating tail over the whole length of the land; and it is easy to trace the ways by which he went, for each green plot trafficked to the builders is held to be a sign of progress, showing into what a great and mighty people we are growing. It is true the waste-layer seeks to justify rather than excuse his habit of life. Of the many grave problems now before us one of the gravest is that of the housing of the poor; if there is no room for the workers in these cities that are for ever enlarging their borders, then, says the waste-layer, no matter at what cost and sacrifice, room must be found, and no one will gainsay this simple truth. But there is a serious difference of opinion among thinking people as to how or where the necessary sacrifice must be made. In all our large towns there are whole districts of poverty-stricken, congested streets; streets that degrade, not beautify; streets it would be a righteous judgment to lay waste; and it is surely here those great buildings might be raised that the latest theory of scientific sanitation has declared to be both cleanly and healthful. The people who are to live in them will not be disquieted by the loss of their old homes or the ugliness of the new; they will still be living in the old environment, and this counts for more with the poor man than the rich; landlords too

will be satisfied, for each room will have its price in these new rabbit-warrens as it did in the tumble-down rookeries on whose site they stand.

For many of us it is a matter of wonder where the great advantages can be in these new conditions of city life. Are these closely packed dwellings either so healthy or so desirable as we are told they are, and will they really help us to solve the problem of over-crowding? A philosophic writer (now gone from us) who, knowing the life of the London poor in all its bitterness, writes of it with a depth of knowledge many an earnest reformer might well envy, has said, "The greatest curse of poverty is the lack of solitude". Now the poor in a city are never alone, and though the absence of solitude may sharpen wits, it has of necessity an ill effect on character. This is why we have learned to look to the land for our strength; and though we may waste it in our cities, we know in the sleepy hamlets and quiet fields there is waiting more lusty life to spend and be spent. Out of their nearness to the earth country-people have learned certain virtues—a wholesomeness of mind and a clean outlook that no number of unfortunate "exceptions" will ever explain away—and as we put these far from us we lose something for which neither education

nor any other material advantage can ever compensate us. In some dim unsatisfactory way we understand this, and while with one hand we are uprooting the little gardens in our old cities, with the other we are building what we are pleased to call garden-cities. Not long ago I saw a garden-city, but it was built for the rich, not the poor. The houses were fine and handsome and stood each in its own plot of ground on land that was once half common half pine-wood. Trees had been cut down to build these houses, gorse and heather dug up to make the neat gravel paths and wide flower-beds; nothing had been forgotten except the illusion of solitude; and I wondered whether happiness was not more possible in the smallest and dullest of town gardens where one can believe oneself unseen, than in this poor pretence of country life. For we have grown to think of the backs of our houses much as we do of our servants; they know all about us, but we have agreed to ignore their knowledge of us; and it is so with our gardens. The backs of our neighbours' houses have windows, and when we are pacing our grass-plot or resting under the trees, curious eyes may be watching and unkind tongues wagging, but we pay no more heed to them than to the stray gossip of the kitchen when it floats to us un-

awares some summer evening through a half-open window: the suggestion of solitude is all we need, and we find it in the little English garden that is always a wonder and an envy to the strangers who come to us from the New World, where with all their wealth they have not yet made for themselves gardens.

It seems strange that, though we know the value to our moral as well as to our physical life of every single blade of grass, we are letting our pleasant places be taken from us with never an effort to save them. Have we forgotten how small is this island of ours—far too small to hold all its own sons and daughters, still less the strangers within our gates; or do we really believe science to be such a miracle-worker that we think, by building high houses and filling them as full as we dare, to create a new order of beings who will not need the green earth and its quiet ways, but will grow up contentedly under these strange new conditions of life? Long ago John Ruskin made his gravely reasoned appeal to this nation to save some common land as playgrounds for its children; but the work of uprooting has gone steadily on, and where is it to end? Will any green breathing-spaces, any dim solitudes be left to us, or will the dragon spread his tail from John o' Groat's to Land's End until one gigantic

city shall cover the length of the land? For we have gone back to the Stone Age and are under the heel of the builder, and, helped by the very powers that should protect us, what he asks for that he has—little gardens, wide parks, green fields, and heather-clad moorland.

Long ago a sorely tried king cried out in his anger, "Who will rid me of this tyrant?" and straightway three knights came forth to do his bidding. But the power of kings has passed, and for us there is no hope of rescue; our pleasant places must go. To penalise the cutting down of a single tree for the next thirty years; to forbid any building except upon ground already used or spoiled of beauty, would be to make laws so wise, so good, so excellent that no Parliament would ever be found to pass them; to see to it that only the ill-built and unhealthy houses were pulled down, a method so sane, so sensible that no authorities would ever countenance it. They tell me these are dreams that could only come true in the Blessed Islands, that Gaelic poets have called the "green meadows of the sea".

A LOST ART.

A LOST ART.

MEMORY is an art, an art to be carefully learned and daily practised ; and a wise man chooses his thoughts as he chooses his friends, not taking the first comers, but the fittest associates, those he can trust and esteem. And so, too, the wise man deals with his remembrances. There are no more enchanting books than those where the author delicately, as a skilled artist selects his colours, chooses for us from the storehouse of his memory certain tender recollections, unimportant, nay trifling, for the most part, but made dear to us because they are dear to him. He writes of them with no conscious effort to please, merely telling us on such and such a day, in such and such a year, he spent his time in such and such a manner. "Chronicles of small beer," they have been contemptuously described by some superior critics, but they are infinitely more to the daily taste of simple-minded people than highly flavoured writing, and far better company than many more ambitious books. Indeed, it is in the very heart

and nature and essence of things that they should not be ambitious. Their claim to immortality lies in this same artless subjectiveness, this shrugging of the shoulders, so to speak, in detriment of praise, this pretence of writing only to please the writer and with no thought of a to-morrow of new editions.

Yet all the time we know, in our hearts, it is the veriest pretence ; that the sly old rogue of an author is laughing at us in his sleeve ; that he is quite as anxious for success as the most self-advertising among us, and turned his sentences with as much care and possibly more consideration than the tiresome dry-as-dusts who write the books we never read.

To-day there is a danger that this art of remembering may soon, if it is not already, be reckoned among those that are lost to us, like the Roman roads, Greek art, and the secret of the building of the Pyramids. We have, it is true, endless books of reminiscences, recollections, biographies, autobiographies, human documents, love-letters (imaginary and otherwise) written in the style that is known as the go-as-you-please, but somehow or other in all of them there is something lacking. The spirit of indolence has gone, and in its stead is a painstaking energy, accompanied by a sub-chorus of self-satisfaction, that can be

read through every line. The events chronicled for us may be of greater importance, the recollections more accurately described; but the old charm has fled, the art of remembering is lost to us.

Great names went to the making of the earlier books—Rabelais, Montaigne, and our own Laurence Sterne, besides a host of well-known and unknown authors; some of whom are to be found in honoured places in all our libraries, and others only on the shelves of curious collectors. Among these friends of the past few books illustrate better the peculiar charm of the wise chronicle of quiet ways than Robert Southey's *Doctor*. To-day it is perhaps but little known. It does not make its appeal to an age that delights above all things in scientific accuracy or in studies of sentimental morbidity; but there is a curious flavour about it to please the thoughtful reader, though it is not one of the classics that all students must at least dip into, even if they eventually decide (as an overhurried royalty treats the humble addresses presented to him by his loyal subjects) to take the whole of it as read.

Southey, himself, like his books, has suffered of late years a cold and ill-deserved neglect. He was, whatever superfine critics may say of him, a great man, though never so great as he

believed himself to be. His high-sounding epics, in spite of Shelley's and Sir Walter Scott's genuine admiration for certain passages in the *Curse of Kehama*, are now deservedly forgotten, but his prose has a charm that is all its own. For he was a generous borrower, frankly acknowledging when he made use of another man's ideas, and even then adding to them sundry little gifts and graces, quips and cranks. No one had read more widely than Robert Southey. His mind was a frippery, where gold and tinsel, fine linen and fustian were huddled together in a certain picturesque disorder, and a wealth of out-of-the way knowledge may be picked out of his writings by the careful and sympathetic reader.

The Doctor was the work of Southey's maturity. Had he lived, the story would have advanced step by step, the inter-chapters have been enlarged according to custom—so says his son-in-law in his short preface to the sixth volume. That it was never so corrected and completed is hardly a matter for regret. On the title-page of the third edition (Longmans, 1839, 7 vols.), the title runs, *The Doctor, Etc.*, and, as the author willingly admits, the Etc. bulks far more largely in the book than the hero. Not but that Dr. Daniel Dove is a very worthy hero, and his

wife Deborah a most delightfully elusive heroine, possessing the power of disappearing for whole chapters—nay, volumes—at a time, that your modern heroine finds impossible. And yet Daniel and Deborah are very real to us, though they only play peep-bo at us through some two thousand eight hundred pages. We catch occasional glimpses of their house, an old house in an old street in the busy centre of an old town, where the doctor brings his bride from her old home to the tune of the clanging bells. "Daniel Dove brings Deborah home" sing St. George's bells in the ear of the eager bridegroom.

> Deborah Bacon hath changed her name;
> Deborah Bacon hath left her home;
> Deborah Bacon is now no more,

say the bells in the ear of the thoughtful bride. A slight touch, it is true; but telling us more of the difference between the man's point of view and the woman's than many pages of introspective analysis could have done.

Readers who love precision and an even sequence of chapters, will do well to avoid *The Doctor*. They would be puzzled, if not exasperated, to find the opening chapter of the first volume marked as number seven, and the first chapter on page forty-five, preceded by an an-

terior first chapter, with a preface, an ante-preface, etc. But the reader who resents such an unusual method of book-making would probably fail to appreciate *Tristram Shandy*, and ask pathetically why certain chapters in that immortal work were merely blanks? So many people prefer a straight road to winding by-paths, but not of these did the old authors who loved to talk take any account.

"Who was the Inventor of Prefaces? I shall be obliged to the immortal Mr. Urban (immortal because, like the King in law, he never dies) if he will propound this question for me in his Magazine, that great lumber-room wherein small ware of all kinds has been laid up higgledy-piggledy by halfpenny-worths or farthing-worths at a time for four score years, till like broken glass, rags or rubbish it has acquired value by mere accumulation." So the chapter preceding the ante-preface begins, but whether the Sylvanus Urban, Gentleman, of that day (John Mitford) ever answered the appeal, or took exception to the humorous comparison of the value of his contributors' articles to "broken glass, rags or rubbish," is uncertain. What is certain is that Southey never expected any answers to his questions. If he could not answer them himself, in all probability no one could; so he

roamed along in easy fashion, asking questions, telling stories that had no ending, quoting well-known and little-known authors, advancing wild theories, while giving us here and there touches of local colour, and odd scraps of history concerning worthies long since dead and forgotten, that make *The Doctor* a valuable book quite apart from its undeniable charm.

The scene is laid in the West Riding of Yorkshire, in the town of Doncaster, and the Doctor in his ramblings round and about the old town shows us the daily lives of quiet people (belonging to what are called to-day the leisured classes) in the middle of the eighteenth century—lives so remote, so apart from ours, that it is almost impossible to realise the beauty of their tranquillity. A spirit of deep content, if we are to believe our Doctor, hung about them, and the quaint little pictures he shows us seem to belong to a world divided from us by a far longer period than merely a hundred and fifty years. To read, to talk, to advance theories, to do good, to spend occasional evenings away from the home fireside in the society of chosen friends, and at last to accept death as the reasonable ending of a reasoned life—this is the moral of *The Doctor*. And a very good moral, too, and worthy of all men's acceptance.

The art of remembering is the whole art of the book; and quaint and curious are some of these odd scraps of knowledge collected together from that seemingly inexhaustible storehouse, the mind of Dr. Robert Southey. We fear the name of Doña Oliva Sabuco Barrero, who in 1587 dedicated her *New Philosophy of the Nature of Man* to Philip the Second of Spain, whose loyal and loving subject she was, has hardly received the honours it merited. For from her, we are told by Father Feyjoo, the English, and afterwards the physicians of other countries, first learned the theory of nervous diseases; and strange and fantastical though this may seem to us, there is a wealth of wisdom in her suggestions as to their cure. Likening the body of the human animal to a tree, Doña Oliva declares that "in the brain, as in the root of the animal tree, all diseases have their origen". This is so strictly in accordance with modern theories as to need no comment, and so, too, is the treatment recommended by this Spanish lady, whose advice reads more like the prospectus of a well-organised convalescent home than a page from a sixteenth century book.

Hope, she tells us, is what supports health and life; fear, the worst enemy of both. So among the best preventatives and restoratives are to be numbered "cheerfulness, sweet odours, music,

the country, the sound of woods and waters, agreeable conversation and pleasant pastimes". What more could the most earnest advocate of a mild form of rest-cure offer than this sweet-sounding list prepared for us in the year of Our Lord one thousand five hundred and eighty seven, by Doña Oliva Sabuco Barrero? And we are all the more inclined to believe in her because she frankly confesses that she has never studied medicine, and writes seemingly from the heart in order to warn us how to preserve our heads. What would we not give to have seen her book, with certain passages marked, after his custom, in Doctor Daniel Dove's own hand, with the initials of his name neatly written in red ink? or, better still, to have heard him gravely discussing the merits and demerits of this most original treatise with some of his intimate friends at those exclusive gatherings where no games of cards were ever played?

Few pictures that Southey has drawn for us are better worth preserving than this of the house called Netherhall, and its worthy host Robert Copley. On an income of twelve hundred a year he lived the life of a king in a fairy tale. "Netherhall was the resort of intellectual men in whose company he (Copley) delighted, and the poor were fed daily from his table." Happy

Robert Copley, to lead so pleasant a life and be remembered by so tender an epitaph! Here foregathered Drummond—afterwards Archbishop of York, and most courteous and genial of men—Gray, Mason; and here, too, Herschel, then a hautboy-player in the band of the Durham Militia, first made his bow to an accomplished audience at one of Robert Copley's weekly concerts. To-day, when the music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is being extensively revived, it is with the sense of meeting old friends that we light upon the names of Geminiani, Corelli, Giardini, etc. The works of these masters were performed by Herschel—so says Miller, the organist, who introduced the hautboy player to the Netherhall critics—"chastely, and according to the original intention of the composers". Perhaps the quiet peace of those far-away days is exaggerated, and the concerts themselves may have been vastly inferior to what our amateurs, trained in Prague, can now give us; perhaps, too, the solemn discussions of those grave, courtly and dignified people would seem even a trifle dull and slow to tongues that have learned the art of clipping words and using a polyglot slang in the place of nobly cadenced English. But at least it is pleasant to catch glimpses of Robert Copley and his distinguished

guests, and to take our place, in fancy, among them; pleasant, if only to sit for awhile by the side of our old friend Daniel Dove, and feel we are near to a wise and a good man.

Among the many dissertations and quotations with which *The Doctor* abounds, not one of the least interesting is a full analysis of the old morality, *Everyman*, that was revived some few years ago by the Elizabethan Stage Society, with much well-deserved success both here and in America. To Southey the play was evidently no new discovery, for he speaks of it as being well known to English philologists, but he would possibly have been as greatly surprised could he have foreseen its successful revival at the beginning of the twentieth century as the general reader would be to learn that a great part of *Everyman* is to be found in *The Doctor*, together with that famous nursery classic, *The Three Bears*. Will the scientifically trained children of to-day care as much for the three bears, their three chairs, and their three bowls of porridge, as their mothers and grandmothers did before them? It is hard to say. Tastes differ, and the child of to-day has far less imagination than the child of the duller nursery and the fewer books. But at least a nursery classic *The Three Bears* must ever remain, even should it eventually share the fate of other classics and

lie neglected and dust-covered on the book-shelves.

Like his greater predecessors, Southey was not afraid to say what he thought, to say it after his own fashion, and to repeat it as often as he pleased. For it is a part, and a very essential part, of the art of remembering that the narrator should be, within limits, a garrulous person—a chimney-side orator who sometimes tells us twice-told tales, but yet always contrives to please us. To-day the art is lost. One reason may be that of late years so many women-writers have crowded into the fields of literature; and good though their work may be, the style of a Rabelais, a Montaigne, a Robert Burton, or a Laurence Sterne is not for them. A man looks back with regret, but without bitterness, to his lost youth; a woman, however eagerly she may protest to the contrary, seldom, if ever, attains to this same calm serenity. Her garrulity, too, is not of the same nature as the man's, and with all her known love of detail, she yet invariably fails in the writing of the small nothings that go to make such a book as *The Doctor*.

It has been urged, and with some show of reason, that women are generally deficient in the sense of humour: it has also been said, though some recent works of fiction would seem to dis-

prove it, that women naturally shrink from the coarseness that gives both body and durability to the writings of men. It would be more true to say that no women are, at heart, Pantagruelists, and it is even doubtful whether any are to be found who really care for Rabelais, though a few may appreciate Laurence Sterne or old Robert Burton. Most certainly no woman could have written *Tristram Shandy*, and no woman would ever have consented to allow Deborah Dove to play so small a part in the story of Daniel.

What publisher to-day would be rash enough to accept such a work as *The Doctor*, even if any one could be found with the wit to write it? For the readers of to-day are not as the readers of yesterday; the short paragraph, the sensational serial, the informing article if only it be not too long or too dry, is what is asked for, and given. The old writers, with their tender recollections, their broad jokes, their funds of knowledge scattered with generous hand along the pages, have gone, and it seems unlikely that any heirs to their wit will arise. We who love them can only fold our hands and be humbly thankful for what they have left to us; for those backward glances, those wise smiles, and the sunset atmosphere of a shadowy past that they have preserved to us for ever.

THE NEW IRISH PEASANT.

THE NEW IRISH PEASANT.

MEN are always somewhat loth to part with their illusions, with the little bundle of dreams they have carried hidden deep down in their hearts ever since the days of credulous childhood. One by one we drop the dreams on the highway of knowledge and press forward unburdened, but it is doubtful whether we are ever grateful to the man or woman who opens our eyes to a sense of the unreality of our beliefs. Of late modern research, whether historical, scientific or critical, has brought many of our dearest fancies to the hammer to be sold as useless rubbish. Historical personages have long since ceased to be treated with reverence; but so far the character of a nation and the temper of its people have been left with the old labels that have done service in past centuries still fastened to them for reference. Now, for the first time, the traditional character of a nation is called in question; not by enemies, but by the very men who should know it best—the men who live among the people, who claim

to know their needs and to preach a national gospel.

We are all familiar with the Irish peasant of the older school of Irish writers; the witty, laughter-loving, lazy, unscrupulous, pious Pat of tradition and fiction, who talked poetry without knowing it, and had a deeper vein of sentiment underlying his light-hearted manner than the dull, heavy Saxon could ever divine. His very rags were more picturesque, more love-compelling, than the rags of any other nation, and his contentment, his easy-going philosophy and indifference to the opinion of his fellows were worthy of an admiration not wholly untinged with envy among those of us who took life more seriously and more sadly. He was the actual living embodiment of the spirit of gaiety, and his very faults were endearing, standing out in delightful contrast to the bovine virtues of the Saxon oppressor. Three virtues he possessed, this typical peasant, for which above all others he was to be praised: his devotion to his country, his love of his Church, and his morality; for where, his admirers would ask, can you find a land where the women are so pure and so virtuous as in Ireland—and when the women of a country are chaste, must not, of necessity, some of the praise be given to the men?

This was the Irish peasant as we once knew

him. By turns merry or sad, full of superstition, witty, idle, devout, hot-tempered, a trifle cruel, a spendthrift, he was admittedly a complex character; but yet we who have Irish blood in our veins loved him, were proud of him, and never wished him any different. But Time, who takes so much away and lays irreverent fingers alike on men and nations, has not spared the Irish peasant. A new school of writers has come, a band of young men who are creating a new national literature, and express themselves for the most part in drama. The Irish National Theatre movement, that (through the generosity of an English lady) resulted in the purchase of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, has been largely responsible for bringing this new Irish peasant into prominent notice, though close students of the modern Celtic school have known of his coming long before he strutted on the stage. He is a strange manner of man, lacking all those persuasive qualities that characterised his elder brother. Hard-fisted, rough-tongued, money-loving, he takes life sadly; instead of loving the land, he is over-eager to leave it for the "streets and crowds and theatres" of the big cities beyond the seas; when he is not actually in revolt against the priests and the creed they have taught him, he broods in sullen resentment over the obliga-

tions religion has imposed on him. He still loves and has a keen eye for beauty, but he marries a farm if he can, or at least the hard-earned savings of a careful father-in-law. He has done with the joy of life, has awakened to the sense of his own nakedness, sees his rags without their picturesqueness, and his country without its glamour; he has lost his illusions, and in his bitterness would fain have us lose them too.

Two plays, *The Well of the Saints*, by J. M. Synge,[1] and *The Land*, by Padraic Colum, are good examples of the cult of the new peasant. In *The Well of the Saints* there is not one lovely or lovable character, and though the blind beggar and his wife are at best but a pair of pitiful scolds, they are still not so repulsive as Molly Byrne, the full-blooded beauty, whose attitude towards her own lover and the blind man (who has just received the gift of sight from a somewhat unconvincing saint) makes sympathy with her impossible. The story of the blind couple by the roadside who have never seen each other, but believe themselves to be "the finest man and the finest woman of the seven counties of the East"; of the saint who cures them of their blindness; of the hatred they then bear to one another; of

[1] This essay was written and published during Mr. Synge's lifetime.

the man's pursuit of Molly Byrne, whom he takes for his wife, and the final renouncement of a fresh miracle when the beggars' newly given sight has faded, because they will not torment their souls "with the sight of the grey days and the holy men and the dirty feet trampling the world," leaves us cold, in spite of its undoubted cleverness—possibly because of it. We feel the author does not resent the lack of all nobility in his puppets, but rejoices over it as though he would say: "Have done with your dreams and your fancies. I will show you life, and the uglier the picture the greater its truth. You shall see no beauty in my impossible saint, but only the dirt on the tired feet; you shall find no pity or tenderness in the heart of my peasant girl, but only lust and vanity."

The Land is a wholly different play. Here is simple tragedy; the plot is slight, but the characters are drawn with sympathy as well as strength, and so impress us with their vitality. The hard-headed farmer, Murtagh Cosgar (ten of whose children have gone to America, leaving him with one son, Matt, and a slow-witted daughter, Sally), is as convincing as the scholar-farmer, Martin Douras, with his clever daughter, Ellen, and his commonplace son, Cornelius. Cosgar will not have a penniless daughter-in-

law, and thinks the land, bought at twenty years' purchase, will be dearer to his son than the woman he loves, this son who surely cannot leave him, because he is "the last of the name". But Ellen Douras longs for the life of cities, and draws the man after her, leaving the two fathers to learn that the land itself is worthless to these gifted children of theirs, who will have none of it. Slow-witted Sally marries Cornelius, but Murtagh Cosgar realises with bitterness the uselessness of the sacrifices he has made; the soil he loved could not hold the son as it had held the father. Throughout the play the note struck is one of regret and of sadness. There is poetry, but no humour; there is love, but no hint of religion: there is nothing to recall the light-hearted peasants of tradition.

Which is the real peasant—the old or the new? Did the early writers wittingly deceive us, and have even the foster-mothers and kindly nurses of our childhood been clothed, by time-softening memory, with virtues they never possessed? Have we indeed lived in a world of dreams, and were these laughter-loving, ragged philosophers of peat and bogland merely the creatures of imagination who never lived outside the kingdom of fancy? Mr. W. B. Yeats assures us that the Irish peasant's lightheartedness

has always been merely a cloak worn to hide the real man from us, but yet Mr. Yeats has himself drawn for us peasants of the older school without suggesting they are untrue to life. There is a sentence in his preface to *The Well of the Saints* that offers a further explanation, of which the full significance has not, seemingly, occurred to him. Speaking enthusiastically of the author of the play, Mr. Yeats says : " He had wandered among people whose life is as picturesque as the Middle Ages, playing his fiddle to Italian sailors and listening to stories in Bavarian woods, but life had cast no light upon his writings ". Is it not possible the eyes that looked coldly on " life as picturesque as the Middle Ages " have, in spite of their owner's knowledge of the Irish tongue, looked coldly, too, upon Ireland, or rather have seen only the shadows in the picture and missed the sunshine ?

A very notable feature in the new Irish literature is the absence of what has been called the Catholic atmosphere. Before all else the peasants of the old school were Catholics ; bigoted, superstitious, yet full of the poetry of a Church that has always preferred to make its appeal to the senses, rather than the reason, of man. In no country in the world, save Brittany, has the Catholic Church claimed to have so strong a

hold upon the hearts of the people as in Ireland, and "priest-ridden" has been the reproach applied to her by all those of us who have outgrown creeds and dogmas. The Virgin and the saints were real to the peasant of the past; they peopled his world with their presence, and created a halo of romance around the dull routine of uneventful lives. An Irish servant once told me, in all seriousness, that when the soul leaves the body it takes the form of a white bird, circles three times round the death-chamber, and then flies through the window. She said she had seen her father's soul so leave the body, and had hastened to open the window wider, in case the bird should hurt its wings; adding, "not but that Our Lady could have helped it through the shut window every bit as well". It was this faith, this belief in his own illusions, that set the Irish peasant distinct and apart from the peasants of other lands who have their superstitions too. One of the finest of Mr. Yeats' sketches is the story told of a young Protestant girl who, wandering among "the white mushrooms upon the mountains," was taken by some peasant children to be "the Virgin out of the picture," because her dress was blue. Other beautiful tales he tells us—of fairies, of Maeve and Deirdre, and half-forgotten kings and queens;

yet they have not the same abiding charm as the stories of the peasants who see visions of God. But we have to reckon with the new order of things, and saints and angels are going out of fashion even in Ireland. They lingered long among the mists and shadows of the green island, but the spirit of change is at work, and Ireland is, if we are to accept the teaching of her playwrights, no longer the home of pious tradition.

The peasants have freed themselves from superstition, and, in so doing, would seem to have changed their whole nature. They are now shown to us as ill-natured and crafty; greedy of gain, and yet taking a morbid view of life, looking upon it with eyes that can see no beauty in the world, but only an intense weariness. They are no longer children, but men and women who have their way to make, and who can calculate on the chances of success as well as another. Mr. Yeats has, it is true, given us mystics and dreamers; but he is alone in still clinging to the spirit of the older tradition, and perhaps it is only because he is a poet that he cannot altogether rid himself of the old turns of phrase. When he wishes us to know the beauty of Cathleen the daughter of Hoolihan, he tells us that she is "purer than a tall candle before the Blessed Rood"; he watches "old Time telling

the rosary of the stars," and for him Mary, Star of the Sea, is "the mother of peace, the mother of dreams and the mother of purity". It was this same attitude of mind that characterised the peasant of tradition. He may not have been better to live with than the peasant of the new plays; but he was very much better to read about, and had a trick of haunting the memory as the realisation of an impossible ideal. In imagination, we saw him kneeling at tawdry shrines, praying to coloured prints that were hopelessly out of perspective, with an intensity, a fervour, that made the very action a miracle of faith; we saw him, before the dawn broke, walking home on a windy Christmas morning along miles of lonely bogland roads after hearing the Mass sung by a tired priest in a whitewashed chapel, and fancied we guessed, though dimly, at the pathetic poetry of his faith. We knew him, too, in other moods; at a horse-fair, or in an English harvest-field when he had come over, in holiday-fashion, to lighten the purse of the Saxon farmer. But it was in the softened mood of piety that we loved him and believed in him.

We shall not see him again with the halo of piety round his head—the halo that never existed, if we are to believe the new teachers, save in our imagination. The divine discontent alterna-

ting with gaiety, that was explained by the older school of writers as the natural outcome of the Celtic temperament, has developed into a certain sullenness of disposition, a lack of graciousness wholly foreign to the generally accepted character of the Irish peasant. He no longer loves as the wild-blooded Rafterys and Hanrahans loved in Mr. Yeats' stories ; but he calculates on the worth of a marriage settlement with a careful eye fixed on the main chance—an eye that would not disgrace a Scotchman, or those terrible French peasants, the aftermath of the Revolution, of whom Balzac has drawn so grim a picture. "The pretty girl that would take me, all bare though I be and lone," no longer appeals to the peasant ; he wants something more substantial than love, for he has become a superior person ; of infinitely more value as a citizen, of infinitely less value as a companion. We feel the work of the world will go more smoothly in his hands ; that a Murtagh Cosgar is more praiseworthy than a Charlie Ward (*Where there is Nothing*), but we would rather tramp the roads with Charlie than buy the land with Cosgar.

Whether the new peasant is the real man, and the old peasant merely the creation of fancy and fiction, must be left to the experts of the Gaelic League to decide. Having forsaken the legends

of the Virgin and the saints, the Irish peasant has, we are told, gone back to those still older legends of half-forgotten kings and warriors, of Cuchulain and Deirdre, and the spirit of ancient Ireland is awakening once more in the souls of her sons. Is this really so, or do the writers' eyes see only what they wish to see while wilfully ignoring all that does not fit in with their own theories? Or maybe something is lost in the process of translation; for it is whispered that some of the new school are only beginning to learn their native language; and is it not possible, in an unaccustomed tongue, to mistake blessings for curses?

ON TRAVELLING.

ON TRAVELLING.

Nearly three hundred years ago a certain traveller hung up his shoes as a votive offering in the little church of Odcombe in Somersetshire. They had carried him safely a-foot on his long tramp through France and Savoy to Venice, and then home again by way of Switzerland, parts of High Germany and Holland; so he thought they merited a worthy resting-place, and inscriptions were made in their honour and placed at the forefront of his book that all might learn what good friends he had chosen for his travelling companions. To-day we have no such leisured travellers; and, alas! no such honest boots. Our ways have changed; but those wise old people who shook solemn heads, and foretold all manner of evil to come, did not realise one half of the changes the railway was to bring. They understood that leisure was killed, beauty shouldered out of place by ugliness, and the great roads were to be no more the highways of the world; they did not understand that the individual life was passing and in men's minds

was arising a new ideal. For as the straight iron lines laid waste their pleasant places, disquieting, as the great road-makers had done before them, the heart of silence, the old ways passed and took with them something more than merely colour and picturesqueness from life. For when any one thing becomes common it ceases to have value, or rather it loses charm, and perhaps nothing brings this home to us so well as the reading of travellers' tales. Even the wanderings of the most famous of them were, to our new reckoning, but a sabbath-day's journey; yet they saw and learned more than we can hope to do, just as nothing we can hope to write will ever touch for splendour those wonder tales of the world's nursery books.

We are in much the same position to-day as the men who watched, with grave misgivings, the heavy running of those first clumsy trains, for we, too, recognise that we are witnesses to the coming of a great change, but we do not fully understand (any more than they did) that it is a change affecting our minds more than our bodies, a change that must result in a different outlook on life. One of the earliest and the most persistent of the dreams of men has been to fly, to beat the air with wings and touch the stars; and the legend of Icarus was but a recognition of this longing, a

moral tale told to preach contentment and teach the vanity of human wishes. The earth was old enough then for its sons and its daughters to have learnt that fulfilment and happiness are seldom yokemates; but we are spoilt children who refuse to learn wisdom and so now the dream is accomplished: under certain conditions, and for a certain length of time, we can fly. If Leonardo da Vinci were alive to-day, I wonder what he would say to our air-ships; would they fulfil his vision of man sharing in the gladness of the bird's flight, or might he not see in them merely the parody of his hopes? For the difference between the old conception and the new is, that we are not now to rival the birds, but act as careful pilots guiding our huge ships through the unknown and infinite air. Though it seems to us a far stranger marvel, the aeroplane will not work so deep a change in our habit of thought as the railway has done, nor will new generations carried at speed through the air in winged ships be half so far apart from us as we are from those old travellers who walked or rode in leisurely fashion along the great highways. In our ideals will only be found a difference in degree, but between us and the old wayfarers of the honest boots lies the shadow of the old world and the new.

There is no denying that the old ways of travel

were pleasant ways, leading to peaceful contemplation and a wise content with narrow outlooks, and the world was more beautiful and more wonderful to the men who learned to know it slowly, moving with caution from place to place, than it is to us who are satisfied with the outside of things. The spirit of to-day was, I think, well defined by a certain old man lamenting the tranquil days of his youth, while bitterly complaining of the blinding dust of the motor-cars—"It is nothing but there and back again now, and don't stop by the way". Yet to stop by the way, if we are to believe what the old writers tell us, was the whole object of the journey; though they did not forget it was to have an ending, and if they were resolved to go to the steppes of Siberia or the plains of Lombardy, to Pekin or Damascus, found themselves there at last. But the joy had been in the going; in the slow march on heavy roads, the turning aside to visit some famous church or stay awhile to study the jealously guarded books in the monastery library, to follow in the wake of the merchantmen whether for safety or for company, and to rest at night in homely inns and listen to the idle talk of fellow travellers. Though they came into the country as strangers, before long they learned something of the life and the thought of its people; learned it as we shall never do who

are eager to hurry from land to land and proudly call ourselves citizens of the world, a world that has shrunk and grown narrower ever since we have tried to smooth away its differences and force all nations, peoples and tongues into one similitude.

Not only in the writings of the old travellers, but in the work of the old painters do we find this same curious contrast between their outlook on life and ours; and the reason Art has lost that delicate sense of perspective, that power of showing us even in the most minute miniature the far-off hills of enchantment and towered cities of mystery, is not because the old craftsmen laboured slowly with heart as well as brain, but because it was their habit thus to look upon the world. In the great library of St. Mark's, Venice, is one of the most beautiful of fifteenth century illuminated manuscripts. Made by the order of a lettered cardinal, begun in the year fourteen hundred and seventy-eight and not finished until fourteen hundred and eighty-nine, this famous breviary lived through stormy days, was buried in haste when the treasures of the Church were stolen, rose again, and now, reverently housed, its colours show fresh as when first the white vellum pages left the hands of the masters who had cunningly wrought upon them with loving and infinite care.

In these pictures, as in the borders and decorations, may be read the minds of the men who made them, and their thoughts are not as ours. Those cities, distant as the clouds, are built of solid masonry; those woods, full of tender life in the spring, shadowy as ghosts in the winter, are real enough for us to walk through.

While I write, the ground is covered with thick snow, and, narrowed by the window-frame to the size of a small picture, I see my forest stretching out until it loses itself in the tall, grey tree-tops where the nests of great birds show like blackened planets against a dull sky. A roughly made low-wheeled cart loaded with willows, so newly cut that the spreading boughs still hold their red blood, is making its way slowly along the white road, an old dog following hard on the heels of the countryman who leads the stumbling pony. Though the window through which I look is new, for the house itself is but of yesterday, the picture is old; one of the masters who worked on the great breviary might well have used it as a background for the manger of the Nativity, and I am reminded of the most beautiful of the group of pictures described as the calendar of the year set forth in the life of the peasant. There the careful master of the house is seen (and he is not unlike my old countryman) plodding through just such

a white world to fodder his horses and house his sheep, while at the foot of the page the wife sitting by the fire is busy preparing food for her man, and the child playing at her feet is looking out through the open door; a subtle touch showing how well the painter knew his subject, for the poor man's door is seldom shut. Tortured Latin verses, the priest's Latin scorned of scholars, give simple rules of health and tell how, in spite of snow, wind and weather, a man may ward off all ills by being bled at the thumbs, refraining from strong drink and singing praises to God; for in this wise book are to be found all manner of homely sayings scattered about among the prayers, characteristic of an age when religion was a part of the daily life of the common people, and even a cardinal was not ashamed to own his belief in the pride of the body. It does not now seem to us worth the while to spend overmuch time upon minute effects of detail, for this is not the day of small things, and we have learned to look for bolder outlines and a wider outlook. When the pre-Raphaelite school, in the middle of the last century, tried to revive the older ways of painting, their work failed, beautiful though it was, because the world had lost the older ways of thinking, so that their art was but an imitation; and however good an

imitation may be, there is always lacking to it the life that gave strength and endurance to the model.

In all this changing world, nothing has changed so much as our manner of travelling. When man first lifted himself from the earth and stood erect is a lost date that it would be vain labour to try to recall; and vain labour to ask for how many years man wandered a-foot before he finally subdued his brothers the beasts and, breaking the neck of their pride, rode in triumph whither he would. Nor is there any record of the first beast mastered, though I incline to belief in the camel, for no reasonable theory but simply because camels and travelling have always dwelt together in my mind. As a child, the picture I knew best was one where the Wise Men mounted on extraordinarily tall camels were seen making their way across the canvas from out one haze of thick darkness into another. Once, I was told, there had been a star, but it could only be seen by the eye of faith, having disappeared behind the mass of reds and blues the unknown artist had long ago spilled from his palette. Those tall camels and their riders held for me a world of mystery. I knew their story, having heard it on many a dull Sunday afternoon, but after a time they became no longer the three

great Kings but, images of all the travellers of that early world history itself has forgotten, and the darkness was the Unknown, the legendary kingdoms of centaurs and giants. When I read Bede's vision of the life of man, of the bird flying through the open door out of the darkness of the wild night into the warmth of a lighted hall, and passing through a farther door into darkness again, I thought of the picture of the Three Wise Men.

The camel has outlived many a changing fashion, and stands for an image of Time, with its loose shambling gait, and its unconcern at all the strange new ways of men, an unconcern shared by the elephant, wisest of beasts, the horse and the ox. Each in its turn has served man, and out of this close intimacy has grown a certain friendly consideration and mutual understanding to strengthen the bond between them, for they know as well as he that without their help he must have still painfully counted the stones and trees by the wayside and seen but little of the wide world. The next great advance was the invention of wheels, but the name, nation or tribe of the discoverer is lost, as was the name of that certain wise man of the past whose prudent counsel saved a great city. Perhaps some idler watching children roll smooth

round stones down the side of a hill saw, as in a vision, the great wheels that were to draw in their swift running one corner of the earth to another, and so hewed out those solid clumsy circular stones joined by a rough pole, that we find in almost the very earliest attempts at picture writing. This was the first rude notion of a carriage. The little house fixed between wheels to carry a man and all that was his along the roads of the world belongs to what, in comparison with the beginning of things, is late history, and lives still for us to-day in the caravan; whether of the East or as we know it best the gipsy's van, lost among deep hedges, moving slowly on by-ways with no seeming aim, but typifying the desire of motion reduced to its lowest activity. Yet this desire is the most natural of all, and did not Dante find the *Primum Mobile* between Eden and the rose of perfected desire?—so that we whose restless feet are driven by our restless hearts are but as leaves blown from the tree of knowledge, fulfilling our destiny.

There have always been the two kinds of travellers, men who hated to sit still, and men who went out to see the world and all the terrors, wonders and glories therein. Now the men who wrote the old books were those who

hated to sit still, and so wandered with no fixed plan, but took life and the road as they found them, stayed wherever they met with a welcome, drank the wine of astonishment at experiences we overlook, and wrote down in their note books sundry wise reflections and odd scraps of knowledge picked up by the way. Wonderful note books they were, stuffed full with quaint conceits that have, more often than not, no direct bearing on the subject in hand, yet seem to be not only here in their place but the very things we want most to hear about, such is the spell of the writers. Having the true traveller's spirit they all followed the golden rule, without which it is just as well to stay in the house where one was born and never so much as look out of the windows. And the golden rule is this: Always remember that every one you meet, be they young or old, rich or poor, wise or foolish, knows some one thing you yourself do not know, some one thing worth the learning. This rule the old writers never forgot. As the country-folk are fond of saying, they had "no pride in them," and did not mind from where they dug the bones and sinews of their meditations, moralisings and grave disquisitions so long as they knew them to be honest bones. The cynical proverb that warns us to believe nothing

we hear and only half we see, would have been held of small account by the old traveller whose business it was to see with both eyes, hear with both ears, and write down, in good faith, all he had seen and heard when he came to the end of the journey. It is true the traveller's tale was not always to be trusted, but time adjusts the balance, and to-day Marco Polo is recognised as a sober historian rather than merely a masterly writer of romance.

We of the iron rails have come to think of travel and distance as one and the same, but in the old times before us travel did not of necessity mean a voyage overseas. From one county to another was a journey holding the possibility of adventure, and the books that please us most are more often than not those telling of some few miles of country the writer knows well and has travelled for years, in all changes of weather and of mood. There is a story told of an old clergyman who, having spent the best part of a long life remote from any town or railway, rebuked a young parishioner who, wishing to emigrate, had urged as an excuse that he " wanted to see something of the world ". The old man reminded the young one that " Travel was God's curse, for did not the Israelites wander for forty years until they were glad enough at last to settle down to a quiet

life in a pastoral country". But when the old man died, somewhere back in the early years of the past century, it was found he had left behind him a number of note-books, full of curious tales, odd beliefs and strange experiences that had come under his notice in those long years of seeming inactivity, though he "Had never gone farther than twenty odd miles from his own rectory"; so the manuscript ended, showing that if we will be content to look out through the windows of knowledge we may sometimes learn as much as those who have sought the uttermost corners of the earth in search of some new thing. And after all, this is why most of us travel—that we may see some new thing.

To-day we are living in a state of expectancy. The new ways of travel are here, but as yet they are on their trial, and there are still some among us who shake their heads and say the aerial flights that Mr. Standish O'Grady and Mr. H. G. Wells have pictured for us with so much of scientific accuracy will never be; that our skies will never be darkened by the voyaging of fiery war-ships and proud merchantmen; that we shall never forsake solid earth for empty air. It was after this manner the old people talked when they saw great trees felled and high lands levelled for the laying of those straight iron lines along which they

in their turn prophesied that trains would never run : the air-ship is with us and we must make the best of it. In these rapid air-flights there will be less to see, fewer friendly greetings and no pleasant loitering by the way, but we shall learn the new ways in time ; we may not care for them, we shall most certainly adopt them. Nor will it be hard for us to accept the newer ways of thinking that come with every vital change, for we are children of the iron rails, inheritors of the gospel of hurry, and that we be carried at greater speed above the earth than we now are over it, is, after all, no such serious revolution ; the first train that ever ran destroyed many more kingdoms of lovely illusion than the first air-ship has done.

In one of the best passages to be found in all her ordered prose, George Eliot laments the death of leisure, a death that has affected the world more deeply than any other since the sun was darkened over the hill of Calvary ; and only last night I was listening to the rough eloquence of a Socialist preacher, who, after his fashion, was making much the same lamentation—leisure is dead, and men do not understand how rare and precious a thing has been taken from them. He laid almost every trouble at the door of this loss ; and some of his talk was wild as the wind that blew through his hair, and some was filled with the common wisdom of

the wayside ; for though the world may not have been a better place when it moved more slowly, men felt kindlier each to other in those quiet times before leisure died. The Russian writer Merejkowski has said, "What little change there is in the web of the daily life of man ! Only the design differs, the foundation is ever the same". But Merejkowski is too great an artist not to know that the design to the man himself is of as much importance as the foundation, being the expression of his individuality ; for though it is true that there is nothing so old as the heart of man, the habit of life holds the possibility of an ever-renewing youth. When all the world is winged, it will be as far removed from the world that went on wheels as the wheeled world was from the world that went a-foot ; we shall be near enough to the stars to have lost the measure of their mystery, and far enough from the earth to have forgotten our kinship with it. The design of the web of life is to be worked out into new and strange patterns, and no one can yet say whether they shall be good or ill.

ON BEING IN LOVE.

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In a little country church that lies somewhat out of the beat of the tourist is to be seen a flat tombstone, and on it are these quaint lines in half-effaced old English lettering :—

> Yet each to each so fond their hearts were set,
> That one stone serves them for a coverlet.

The fond lovers who have left behind them this simple record of their affection were husband and wife in the early days of the seventeenth century, and any one straying into the church may read it with a smile or a sigh just as the mood compels him. When I had puzzled out the words it seemed to me that it was well they had been thus written, for love is in itself so strange and so beautiful a thing that we can never learn enough about it, however many lips, dead or living, tell us of their stories.

There were many other tombs in the old church of far greater interest, no doubt, to the artist or the antiquary. One was of a brave and

gallant knight who, being filled with pious intent, had gone on pilgrimage to Palestine after justly devising and settling his estate. But he died on the way, before he could see the holy places for which his ancestors had fought with a good will in those wars of the Crusade that, even when he began his journey, had become but as a half-forgotten legend in the minds of living men. The pride of place was given to the knight; but within the altar rails was the founder of a noble family, whose coats of arms were set in all the pomp of heraldry round about the coloured effigy that lay, so like to a living man, under the tall carved stone canopy. But not one of these stately monuments touched me as did the plain, flat stone, with its doggerel, jingling rime that gave such sweet assurance of faithful devotion. There was something so human, so childlike in this very evident desire to commemorate the spring-time of a love that had never come to autumn, that I felt as sad as if I had opened all unawares a secret drawer filled with old letters and had read words written long ago by some one very dear and near to me. There was a personal note that carried truth with it, and I knew, by some unguessed subtle touch of intuition, the tombstone did not lie, but that the dust beneath it, lovingly mingled, held still both warmth and

vitality and was triumphant, even in its ruin, over the chill and immobility of death.

I did not try to learn anything more about the lovers, or search out the house they had lived in, or see their portraits, or discover any further history of their happy peaceful lives than they themselves had told me. But coming out of the grey silence of the church into the glow and warmth of that September afternoon, I began to think over the many things that have been written and said by the wise ones of the earth on this same subject of love. Poets, philosophers, cynics, have all placed their little stone on the great cairn that has been rising ever since the world began to honour the most powerful yet most powerless and least comprehended of all the passions. And still the pile rises higher and ever higher towards the heavens but never touches them, because it is in the very heart and nature of things that, if it did, our feet being shod with knowledge, we should straightway use the cairn for a ladder and take the very heavens themselves by storm.

There has been as fine a diversity of opinion as to the nature, quality and durability of love as on that of any subject in the world, and, on the whole, with far better reason. For it is matter of almost universal consent, that the poorest and most ignorant of men may know as much

about love as the very finest of the poets; at some time or other in our lives we one and all believe we are in love. It is here we tread upon the heels of controversy, for what do we mean by this common phrase, being in love? There are so many ways of looking at and considering of love, that it is all too easy to become lost in a maze of argument without ever drawing near to any conclusion unless we be prepared to answer this first and most necessary question. And the answer is hard to find. For men and women not being all cut out after one pattern (though it was so in the beginning) have hearts as various as their faces, and if we could only have a general census on love, and see to it that none but honest answers were given, our elaborate theories would have many a rude shock. For in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred, the honest answer would prove, beyond all possibility of doubt, the hopeless depth of ignorance that exists in most men's minds as to this so-called universal passion.

To speak sober truth, being in love is a rare experience, reserved for the finer spirits among us, and even the poets themselves in spite of the beauty of their verses sometimes write of it without the fulness of personal knowledge and understanding. A misconception that has grown with

the growth of the earth as to the very nature and essence of love is too often accepted as an actual verity, so that the best of us have learned to be content with the mask and the clothes, foolishly believing we have met, face to face, the living, breathing god. Yet to but few does he vouchsafe to reveal himself, as the great love stories of the world prove. For they, too, are but few when all are told—Helen and Paris, Tristan and Isolde, Launcelot and Guinevere, Naisi and Deirdre, Paolo and Francesca, Abailard and Heloïse are the names that come most readily to our lips, and surely the greatest of these is this last pair of famous lovers. They were blameworthy, but, looked at from the highest moral standpoint of conventional civilisation, so were all the others, and, in the end, these two knew a bitter repentance. Abailard in his lonely sea-girt monastery pouring out his heart to far-distant Heloïse has always appealed to me far more than the men whose business it was to spend their days in the breaking of lances and laws. For he was vowed to another and a better calling and had, to heighten his love, the keen stings of regret and remorse, regret for past joys, remorse for their enjoyment.

I know that the breaking of religious vows was at one time as common as their making; I

know, too, there are other versions of this self-same story, and that it is somewhat the fashion to-day to represent Heloïse as an intelligent schoolmistress, indulging herself in her leisure hours by epistolatory dallyings with an elderly scholar. But I believe that Abailard and Heloïse, being no common persons, felt to the full measure the bitter tragedy of their unhappy loves, and were haunted in those lonely hours of meditation when the chill of age was creeping over them by two most terrible ghosts, a monk and a nun habited in purity who were even as they might once have been. And for this picture I give up willingly all those other lovers of whose names the world seems as though it could never grow weary; Launcelot the dishonoured knight, Guinevere the faithless queen, Golden Helen with "the face that launched a thousand ships," steadfast Deidre, Paolo and pale Francesca reading a love-poem to their hearts' undoing, Irish Isolde drinking the love potion only to learn Death was the high priest who would mate her to Tristan. Mighty lovers were all of these, yet the monk and the nun seem even more real than they.

There is a certain mood, and it is known to the most of us, when we find ourselves to be in love with love; when the first chance comer if only the scene be set aright stands a fair chance

of being forced to play, whether with a good grace or an ill, the part of lover. For it is love we want, and so we straightway dress up the most convenient figure we can find and love it, whether it will or no. Calf-love, lad's-love, call it what you will, it is sweet and fragrant while it lasts, as the early blossoming of the year is sweet when the smell of the earth in all the joy of her young motherhood is fresh upon it. This love comes, too, in the spring, and is a very pleasant memory to us for all the rest of our lives; and it has grown to be confounded in men's minds with that other sweet and pleasant and joyful memory called youth.

> Mais elle avait pour me charmer,
> Ma jeunesse que je regrette,

sang the poet, and surely he was right. It was not the lost Rosette he lamented, so much as that up-springing of the heart, that stir in the blood that comes with each new year to old mother earth, but only in the early days of their pilgrimage to her sons and to her daughters. It was in the spring-time, his spring-time, the singer knew Rosette, and it is his youth he has mourned in verse that will never die.

I was walking across the fields one soft April morning to a little village that I know well,

where every sight, sound and scent is familiar to me, when I saw a girl come from an old thatched cottage to draw water from the brook. The cottage stands alone in a half-cultivated garden, and at the back runs the brook that is being turned by its owners into a general rubbish bin. Yet, in itself, it is still beautiful. It winds through low lush meadows pale with cowslips and lady-smocks, past a wide willow-patch golden with catkins, and creeping under a little wooden bridge to the welcome shade of widespreading trees seems, in some mute appealing fashion, to resent the broken bottles, rusty kettles and all the odds and ends of trivial household merchandise that help to foul its purity. Now I have seen water fetched from that brook a hundred times before, and have never so much as given it a thought. Whether it was the sense of spring in the air after the long late winter, or whether it was a certain charm in the girl's face, I cannot tell: I only know that as she walked to the water's edge carrying a flat tin pannikin in her long, thin, bare childish arms and knelt down among the sallow shoots and lilac bushes that were breaking into leaf, she became a very part of the great mystery of life and love; while the mere action of dipping the basin into the fouled water trying hard to free itself from all

impurity, partook of the nature of some ancient rite, some offering made in early days to the old earth gods. She was herself so young and all around her was the symbolism of youth, while in her eyes shone the first faint stirrings of a vague and indefinite hope. At that moment the first plough-boy, dumb as a sheep, who came louting by would seem to her to be the longed-for lover, and so he would find this simple nymph of the water-pail an easy maid to woo and an easy maid to win. Long years after maybe, she will look back regretfully and believe she loved the stupid farm lad, and never know it was only the spring, the warmth of the earth, the sunshine, and the natural desires of youth that troubled her.

To be in love is something far different to this careless, happy, spring-time wooing that has nevertheless given us most of our best poetry and some of our best prose. That wise ancient Plotinus wondered, and some of us still wonder with him, whether love be indeed a god, or a devil, or a passion of the mind, or all of these in one; and another wise man has told us that love is the wine of magic and must mature in darkness, cold and sorrow before it is fit to be given to men to drink, and the damp of the earth shall be mixed with it and it shall be bitter to their

taste, though it give them wisdom and strength. Even as they drink, they know they will never again be as are other men, for they have taken of the wine and learned the hidden secrets of life. It is not for nothing that a clumsy instrument of torture is the symbol of the most perfect example of love the world has known, or that one of the greatest of saints has said, "Love that cannot suffer, is not worthy the name of love". For love and sorrow are one and the same; by no known process of arithmetic can they ever be divided, and to be in love is a most serious and solemn matter, and would be more serious still were it half so common an experience as it is said to be. It is possible for a man to marry, beget heirs to fortune, lead a life of exemplary affection, and yet to have never a hint or an inkling of the real nature of love; it is possible, too, for a man to vagabond the world and take his pleasure therein, and yet learn nothing of the abiding beauty of love. Sorrow is common enough and suffering is common enough, but the sorrow and the suffering that, mated with desire, are a very part and essence of that strange thing called love, are so rarely met with as still to be reckoned a mystery even in an age that despises mystery, and is prepared to give rational and wholly satisfactory

explanations of all the hard sayings that have vexed the troubled hearts of men since ever the world began.

There is truth in the cynical proverb that no one of us would ever fall in love if we had not heard it so much talked about. It is the work of the poets, those garrulous busy-bodies who will never mind their own business, who have taught us jigs and lilts and balletings, and bewitched us into believing spring is the wooing season and that mating-time will come to us as surely as to the birds on a Valentine's morning. "I want to write lyrics again," one of them said to me, and his lyrics will last as long as the language, "and so I must go away and have a serious flirtation; that is the only way they can be written." So he has gone away into the still country and I suppose is there playing at being in love, and sooner or later the world will find itself the richer by some beautiful verse. But he does not pretend this is anything more than a passing mood—a mood created at will that he may sing a love song. He knows well enough that real love is not lyrical; it is silent for the most part, and when it speaks, the words hurt us as does that one letter of Abailard to Heloïse wherein the man strangles the monk—an old letter to-day, but the heart in it bleeds as freshly

for us as does the sacred heart of miracle in the eyes of those who see and, seeing, believe. What we call the mystery of love, a mystery every silly boy and girl and many a foolish man and woman think they have fathomed, is nothing more than the mystery of youth. It is a scent faint as that of a rain-washed primrose solitary in dark pine-woods, but yet it has power to distort our vision, turning valleys into mountains, night into day, and any low-bred lass into a queen ; Titania and the ass's head is a comedy that can never grow old. In this sense it is true enough that we have all been in love, have all gone out a-jaunting in the freshness of the morning and met with many strange adventures by the way, have all "pursued a maiden and clasped a reed," have all mistaken clouds for palaces and the blue haze hanging over familiar fields for the mist and glamour of magic. It is not love, but something sufficiently like unto it to justify us in our belief that, in the cool of the day we, too, have walked with the god among the trees of the garden that holds the rivers of life and healing. There is an old love charm, old as the speech of men, and if I remember rightly this is how it runs—"You for me and I for thee and for none else ; your face to mine and your head turned away from all others". It holds the

whole secret of love. But who, in those early days of braver and more reckless wooing, did not know even as he whispered the charm in the silence of the woods where the friendly spirits lived, that the face he loved was already turning from him and the head filled with other thoughts, and all that would be left to him be but a memory? For those who are sure of each other have no need of a love charm, and yet it is one of the oldest of the pitiful ties men have tried to make that they might the better bind their restless hearts to the changing hearts of women.

The saint was right, for love is sorrow and sorrow is love, and the measure of love's truth is whether or not it can pass through the four fires—the fire of sacrifice, the fire of renunciation, the fire of repentance and the fire of endurance; and how few of us are cast in the high heroic mould that alone can make of us worthy lovers! Instead, like children we want to be happy, to play a little in the sun, and let love, if it will, make a fanciful pattern across our lives, like the interlacing of fresh-leaved boughs seen against a clear sky. And so we are content with the lyrical mood, with the dream, the song, and the memory that is as sweet to us as was the scent of the cassia and the frankincense the queen brought to the great king in the heyday of his

splendour when she told him all that was hidden in her breast. We have all when we were young wandered through the forest of enchantment and kept time by the true lover's clock, have sighed every minute, groaned every hour, and proved ourselves "mortal in folly". Yet unless I have strangely misread the Book of the Great Mystery, but few of us have ever been in love.

BUYERS AND SELLERS.

BUYERS AND SELLERS.

THE poets and the artists are never tired of saying that all commerce is vulgar and unworthy the serious consideration of high-thinking men and women. They tell us when craftsmen worked for the pure love of art then art was at its highest and best, and that when trade enlarged itself and became commerce art died, slowly, painfully but surely. Even the poets know that all the fashionings of men's hands but seldom stayed with their original makers; as soon as the carpenter had hewn the wood or the potter baked the jar, the first comer whose offer of exchange was good might carry away the finished work, for the work was made for the selling. Only the careless rhymer, wandering through green woods on a soft spring morning and singing aloud in the joy of his heart of the gladness of the earth, took no heed of payment. Yet he, too, was paid in kind with a night's lodging or a day's meal for singing this new woodland song of his to the great lords in their

castles or the country people in their cottages in those happy days when books were rare and only wise men wrote them for wise men to read.

So when the poets say that art died when men began to care about the money they earned, it is only a half of the truth. Art died when, instead of each man working his best and spending long hours to bring some one line or curve to perfection, a common pattern was fixed and, machinery taking the place of hand-labour, that same pattern was repeated for a number of years by workers grown dull and heavy with the noise of cranks and wheels; who, never having seen the original design, could not say, even if closely questioned, why it had been made, still less what was its meaning. With machinery evil came into art as surely as the serpent into the garden, for men ceased to think or to imagine for themselves but trusted to the imagination of others, and thus became dullards working all day at the things they neither knew nor understood. Of these conditions commerce was born, has thriven under them, and killed the finer arts; we are to-day at once a richer people by the very magnitude of our trade, and a poorer by the loss of our power to make beautiful things.

Even trade has its ideal, an ideal attained when the craftsmen who wrought cunningly in

copper and ivory, in gold and in silver; the painters who ground and mixed their own colours; the weavers who wove the great tapestries; all worked for some noble patron who understood the worth of the wares and had them taken straight from the workshop into his own palace. Benvenuto Cellini, the finest craftsman and the biggest rogue in the whole history of art, whose famous rosary of carven peach-stones and pearls is one of the lost wonders of the world and its recovery the vain dream of every collector—this Benvenuto was a lover of money who knew to its uttermost fraction the value of all that he did. He cajoled Popes and other mighty dignitaries; he always gave his work to the highest bidder; but the artist's pride in him made it impossible for him to turn out anything unworthy of his name, and he sold without shame because he himself was the seller. For it is one of the counsels of perfection that the seller shall offer to the buyer only those things that he himself has made, thus masking them with the shadow of romance; and it was this close friendly relationship between the buyer and the seller that made possible the upholding of a high standard of art, a standard lost to us to-day in the dust and din and strife of our great machine-fed workshops.

Standing on my table while I write is a small wooden bowl, such a bowl as once found a place on every table and was used indifferently to hold mead or milk. Light and delicate in workmanship, it is of elegant shape but has no beauty of decoration, and yet any one handling it can feel this is no common bowl. Like those famous bookbindings whose whole value lies in the straight tooled lines that say nothing to careless eyes, the value of the bowl is shown in two lines that circle it round like the King of Thule's lost ring, one being cut an inch below the brim, the second two inches above the base. How long ago that pattern was first designed who now can say? This bowl was made in a certain happy valley at the foot of the Welsh hills, and the tools that fashioned it are much the same as those with which men worked before the days of Noe and the Great Flood. For long generations the tools and the trade have passed from father to son; and when he was asked how far back the legend of the family ran the old man answered with pride—"Since ever the hills have stood". The friend who brought me the bowl then asked them why had they never tried to ornament their work, adding to the beauty of its outline a further beauty of decoration? and he traced with a pencil some twisted vine-wreaths and

bunches of grapes, and gave the sketch to the old man's son, telling him to carve it on the wooden bowls and promising both men that when he came the next year he would draw for them another design more intricate and more delicate, so that the forgotten glories of the art of wood-carving should be born again in that green valley at the foot of the Welsh hills. My friend was full of enthusiasm, and promised me bowls of such beauty as should even rival the best work of the most famous of the old wood-carvers ; each year was to bring its bowl with it. But no more have come to me and my friend keeps silence ; so I think the father and the son must still go on fashioning with their rough tools the same old pattern, for the country folk who buy from them desire nothing better : it is only the artist with his ever unquiet soul who seeks to make his world anew, the rest of us are content to sell whatever is wanted most.

Buying and selling is the beginning of civilisation and the earliest art of the wayside ; the first man whose water-gourd ran dry, and who gave for water in willing exchange the treble of its worth in roots and berries, unwittingly established the first sound principle of commerce—the seller must make as great a gain as he can on the wares he sells. All buyers, knowing this from hereditary

instinct, assume a suspicious attitude and the war begins ; it is a part of the business and not by any means the least instructive. In the story of "Cousin Pons" Balzac has told us something of his own experiences as a collector. The old musician—poor with the terrible silent poverty that finds no sympathy in great cities—has spent the best part of his life in collecting rare pictures, waiting with almost Eastern patience hours, days, months and years to secure his treasures ; and it was here (Balzac says) that he found his happiness, for "in the give-and-take of barter lies the joy of joys". It is warfare and not always bloodless ; "it is a duel, eye to eye," the more deadly when the buyer is as well armed with knowledge as the seller, and the prize one that cannot be fought for again. The combatants stand on equal ground, for each has gauged well the other's experience ; but it is a fencing-match in which one false step may mean defeat, one clever feint victory ; and the assumed indifference, the affectation of reluctance, the pretence of dissatisfaction, when at last the coveted possession changes hands is a more elaborate piece of acting than can be found on any stage. This is the poetry of commerce, and like all true poetry it is growing rarer every day : Cousin Pons would now have had but little chance of founding the wonderful collection he

had planned to leave to France but that found its way instead (as all readers of his pitiful story know) into the unworthy hands of his heartless relations. If the little musician were alive to-day he would learn that the poor buyer has no chance, for rich men pay to have rare books, rare pictures, rare works of art collected for them; and the ring of dealers prosper and wax fat through the ignorance of the wealthy buyers. He would learn, too, how this very ignorance has reaped a ripe harvest of dishonesty. There are certain bric-à-brac shops where I would like to take the ghost of Cousin Pons. I could show him furniture so thickly coated with dirt as to deceive the unwary, so aggressively worm-eaten that, like the wig and paint unskilfully worn by an inexperienced actor, they tell out the youth beneath. I wonder what he would say to the wholesale manufacture of antique fire-backs, noble oak chests, carven ivories and faded tapestries? Not that clever imitation was unknown to him; but it was then an art, it is now a vulgar counterfeit. In these shops there is no fine display of wit, no caressing of the buyer's vanity, no suggestion that the seller is merely a courteous gentleman anxious that every one who comes shall carry away something more than the memory of a pleasant visit. All this excess

of ceremony belonged to an earlier day, and the ghost of Cousin Pons would feel ill at ease in his old haunts.

I learned my first lesson in the art of selling in the market square of a little town in the heart of the Hampshire hop-gardens from a travelling trader. Every night save market night that square is dreary as a derelict ship; there is no sign of life in the ancient house that fills the one side, or in the little shops and the less pretentious houses that from the other three throw their black shadows upon the moon-whitened cobbles. The man had drawn up his van opposite the great house, and though the square was empty (for the farmers and shepherds and country folk had drifted away into the shelter of friendly inns) he began to spread out his wares. Seen in the uncertain flare of the naphtha lights it was easy to imagine the cheap gaudy-patterned carpet hanging over the cart-rail to be a costly Persian praying rug, the dyed sheepskin the hide of some rare beast, and the watch hanging from a long shining chain the talisman of a wizard skilled in charms and gifted with the power of divination. As I watched him from my corner I saw that the man himself had two separate and distinct personalities. In the moonlight he was nothing more than a lean, anxious, worn, hungry

fellow with his living to make ; when he stood before the naphtha lights he seemed a priest at the altar filled with faith. Backwards and forwards he passed, now the one man, now the other, until at last he took his place by the cart-rail and sent his voice out into the empty silence of the square, calling upon the shadows to "Come and buy ".

There was no answer, but he was not discouraged. Again and again he cried out into the silence and then began to praise his wares as though the dark shadows were living men and women who could traffick with him ; the carpet was as famous as the merchant of Bagdad's ; the watch kept time as true as the forest clock ; the sheepskin had come from the Siberian steppes and would out-last a hundred home-made rugs. Everything he had was of value, but he should never visit this little town again because he had come into a fortune and was going to live like a gentleman. I was sorry so much of imagination should be wasted on one listener ; yet even as I pitied him a crowd began to gather, though he seemed to take no heed of it but went on with his splendid monologue, thus holding his rude stage. One of the countrymen made a timid bid for the watch, but the traveller affected not to hear ; the offer was repeated, but he laughed

it away as an ill-mannered jest, and, turning suddenly to a girl standing by, asked if she had not something better to say. Flattered by this unexpected speech, she made a more satisfactory offer; he hesitated, and a boy pressed in. This irritated the first bidder, and to him, after a few noisy minutes, the watch was handed; and then the trader began to talk about his fine carpet. I stayed until all the wares were sold and the country-folk, hugging their clumsy bundles to them, had gone back to their homes and to repentance. Never once had the man made a mistake in singling out the likely buyer, never once had his enthusiasm failed him or his eyes lost the look of wondering rapture when they turned upon the cart-rail and the tawdry decorations hanging from it; and here was the secret of his success. He believed in himself and he believed, too, in the wares he sold. He knew they were at least as good as anything these countrywomen could buy in the little shops, and long companionship had given to them the same kind of value that long friendship gives to an ordinary weather-beaten face; we reckon its beauty by our affection.

I never saw him again. Long before I awoke to a new day, with his lightened van he had once again begun his endless journey along the

"wet roads where men walk," to halt at some other town, call fresh crowds together, tell the same story of his newly found fortune of fairy gold, and sell his oddly praised wares to other credulous buyers. But the memory of him has stayed with me to prove good the old saying that if one keeps any seemingly worthless thing for a full seven years one will surely find a use for it. Nothing then seemed of less use to me than an object-lesson in the art of selling; yet nothing has been of greater use since I, too, became a seller. This means seeing the world with different eyes, or perhaps it would be truer to say seeing with more widely opened eyes a wholly different world. Not such a beautiful world, but a far more interesting one, bearing the same relation to the old as the living trees to their image in some fern-locked forest pool; the buyer sees the trees painted on the water without spot or blemish, the seller sees all the gnarls, the twisted joints and the dead twigs. For it is not the best side of human nature that comes out at the bidding and the buying. The natural greed in man, outcome of the nakedness of his birth, here finds full play, every one being so eager to do well for himself that he forgets to conceal his covetousness. In the duel of wits the seller must of necessity pander to this very human

weakness, overcrying the worth of his wares from no inherent dishonesty but simply because, by the unwritten rules of trade, the buyer must be persuaded that common things are precious things: it is not alone the wayfaring trader who cries out to the crowd that the gaudy carpet has come from the looms of Persia, or that the homely sheepskin is the hard-won hide of some rare beast.

The buyer sets out to make a bargain in which he is to have the whole of the advantage, and to foster this delusion is the aim of the seller; whence has arisen a complete mythology of the workshop, with no more actual foundation than have some other legends that pass for history. "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer," but when he tells his tales of the sale-room with himself for hero, does he never wonder what the seller has to say? If there were not already far too many books in the world, and too few people with the time to read them, a book might be made on this matter of buying and selling that would be well worth the reading. It is Anatole France who tells us what romance lies in a door, and wonders how we can ever look at one without being filled with a sense of fear at the thought of the visitor who may at any moment come through it. When he wrote, perhaps he was

thinking of the doors of the old second-hand book-shop on the Quai Voltaire, where he grew up to manhood. For through the doorway of such shops pass, in the slow procession of the years, many forgotten human curiosities ; and the seller, waiting expectant among the books he has learned to love, never knows to what strange adventure the day may not give birth. There is a certain odd relationship between the old worm-eaten volumes and the silent meanly dressed people who steal in and fondly handle them. For books are the passion of the unsuccessful, the friends and companions of disappointment and of poverty ; and if a rich man gathers together a fine library it is often the poor man, lean with longing, who has told him what to buy. Outside a second-hand book-shop I once saw a bright-eyed old woman in Workhouse bonnet and shawl looking wistfully at the trays full of books, until, unable to resist temptation, she took one up and began to read, lost to the noise of the street or the mud that splashed upon the pavement. I came closer and saw that it was a volume of Pascal's *Pensées*, but before I could speak she had placed it back on the tray and, moving quickly, disappeared down a side alley as a man came out of the shop. "If she had the money she'd be one of my best customers," he said, beginning to rearrange

his wares. "She comes as often as she can get away, and I never disturb her, but let her read as long as she likes; she must have spent many an hour here." I wondered who the old woman had been whose hunger for books even the dull routine of the Workhouse had not stilled, and I have always regretted that in my surprise I let her go away empty-handed.

It is in the small out-of-the-way businesses that the seller meets with the most curious buyers; in the great shops where from the early morning hours until the shutters are put in at night crowds of people throng together, they know nothing of the pleasure of trade but only of the profit. But I know something of the pleasure, for my trade is the selling of books, and it has brought me into touch that is almost friendship with many people come from many lands and speaking many tongues. The books are printed at the back of a house nearly four centuries old and are sold in the front of it, so following as nearly as possible the counsel of perfection that the makers of the wares and the buyers shall be brought into close and intimate relationship. The low oak-beamed workshop looks out upon a garden that is now filled with old-fashioned flowers, common flowers planted for their gay colours, pink hollyhocks, red roses, pale blue

larkspurs, dark blue corn-cockles; while the low brick wall is hung with honeysuckle, ferns and mullein growing out of crevices left by the fallen mortar; and the throb of the engine turning the great cylinder sounds in this quiet place like the cry of some strange bird of prey in a sleepy reed-bound river bed. The garden is the poetry of this house with the irregular tiled roof, the solid square chimney, the hanging timbered gable-end; so, too, are the books that, with their wide margins and eighteenth-century type, are not all unworthy of the dead masters who wrote them.

I have lived so long with the books that I have grown to love them, and our daily companionship has taught me not alone their real value, but something more that may elude the eyes of those buyers who look only on the outside of things. To me they are rare and precious; and when the heavy oak door with the great hinges swings open it is a moment of anxious suspense. Will these chance wayfarers, attracted either by the hanging sign, or wishful to idle away an empty hour, understand and value the wares, or must I practise upon them the unforgotten lesson learned long ago from the travelling trader?

THE VANITY OF LEARNING.

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In the thin, grey-covered volume (printed in Ireland) that holds for us the last words of Mr. J. M. Synge, there is a curious poem, an echo of Villon, called "Queens". Here, like the costly beads on some ancient necklace, are strung in rhythmical measure the names of beautiful women of old times, some still unforgotten, others perished out of men's memories :—

> All the rare and royal names
> Wormy sheepskin yet retains,
> Etain, Helen, Mæve, and Fand,
> Golden Deirdre's tender hand, . . .
> Queens men drew like Monna Lisa,
> Or slew with drugs in Rome and Pisa—

and the verse-maker ends with the conclusion to which every lover has come before him :—

> These are rotten, so you're the Queen
> Of all are living, or have been.

The mere sound of these "rare and royal names" can still bring back to us, faint as the scent of dying may, something of their once-famed beauty,

and we see them as images reflected in running water that, though broken, have not lost their colour and outline.

Save to a few scholars, the name of Anne Conway recalls nothing; she herself is as utterly forgotten as are her writings, though in the middle of the seventeenth century the fame of her learning had spread over Europe, and the great Leibnitz spoke of her with profound reverence, while men so unlike as Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist, and Francis Van Helmont, the wandering adventurer, went to her for help and inspiration. Nor was it only for her learning men praised her, for in his preface to that lengthy tract "An Antidote against Atheism," More has as much to say of her beauty as her wit, and despite the fashion of the times the wise doctor was no flatterer. But to-day, even in her Warwickshire home, few will be found to remember Anne "Countess of Connaway and author of the *Opuscula Philosophica*"; any one of the "Queens whose finger once did stir men" has made for herself a surer immortality.

They were unquiet times when Anne was born. Her father, Sir Heneage Finch, a notable man of law, was Speaker to the Parliament in the first year of his most unhappy Majesty, the first Charles. Clever, tactful, able to keep a cool

head in difficult situations, and of boundless ambition, it was through Finch's untiring efforts that his widowed mother was raised to the peerage as Viscountess Maidstone and afterwards created Countess of Winchelsea, Anne's uncle Thomas eventually succeeding as the first Earl. An Earl's title, as Heneage Finch well knew, was a valuable ornament, and one not to be despised even by high-thinking people; and next to the pomp and dignity of rank, came the solid though less pretentious advantage of wealth. His first marriage had left him a poor man with seven sons and seven daughters; for his second wife he chose an heiress, a widow possessed of some beauty and many admirers, and by her had two daughters. Of the elder, Elizabeth, we know nothing; she married a landed squire and passed into peaceful obscurity. The younger, Anne, on the 10th of February, 1651, was married "with consent of her mother, the Lady Finch, at Kensington, Middelsex," to Edward Conway, "son of the Right Honourable Edward, Viscount Lord Conway, of Ragley, County Warwick". Though Heneage Finch is described in the marriage license as "late deceased," he must have died about the time of Anne's birth, for his marriage with the handsome widow was in the April of 1629 and his death in the

December of 1631. Lady Finch was a loving mother who devoted herself to the care and upbringing of her two children, and was well content through the stormy years of the Civil Wars to live in seclusion in the leafy village of Kensington. Possibly she recognised in her younger daughter, beyond the beauty and sweetness of disposition, the rarer gift of genius, for Anne received an unusual education, being taught, above the ordinary accomplishments of a young woman of rank, the learned tongues. She took kindly to the deeper knowledge, for her favourite authors were Plato and Plotinus, her most closely studied book the *Kabala Denudata;* she lived apart in a world of her own, a world of obscure learning and strange, fantastic thinking. It would be even possible to suspect of affectation this girl imitating the demeanour of some grave grey-headed philosopher, if her whole life had not borne out the absolute sincerity of its beginning. She loved learning for learning's sake, and had she lived in the Middle Ages, would doubtless have chosen the cloistered life, and died the mother abbess of some great convent made famous by her piety and wisdom. But the birth stars read for her a different fate.

Unless Edward Conway has been grievously wronged, he must have been the last man a

woman of rare charm would have chosen for a husband. Not one of his friends had so much as a kind word for him; he was accused of a singular meanness of disposition, a sullen and overbearing temper, and it was said that "he did not do a praiseworthy act in the whole course of his life". Yet his letters give a very different picture. Writing at the time of his father's death, he says, "A great grief it is to me; for I do not love my friends with an ordinary affection, and his kindness to me was extraordinary great," and his appreciation and befriending of Jeremy Taylor, "the choicest person in England appertaining to the conscience," should not be forgotten. But whenever he speaks of Anne, even in the earlier letters to his brother-in-law and faithful correspondent, Sir George Rawdon, there is a coldness of tone and absence of affection, nor is there any hint of admiring pride. He speaks of her with the impatience of a selfish man who has no sympathy with a delicate wife, but rather pities himself; and after all is there not some excuse for him? At the very beginning of their married life (tradition says on the wedding day) Anne was stricken with a strange and incurable malady; she was suddenly seized with violent pains in her head, and to the day of her death this agony never left her.

Whether he loved her or not, it must have been a cruel blow to Edward Conway, then a man of five and thirty, while Anne was only twenty. From the first he seems to have determined that they must go their separate ways, for, writing to Sir George Rawdon about seven years after the marriage to tell him the unlooked-for tidings that there is a possibility that Anne may bear him a child, he says, "My hopes were long since sealed against any impetuous desires after children". Though belief in the power of magic crystals and fortune-telling gems is not yet dead, some of the preparations for the birth of this child, from whose coming so much was expected, read strangely to us to-day. There was, it seems, a "certain eagle's stone esteemed of great value in a hard labour" that Anne Conway coveted greatly, and tried, with what seems a wholly unnecessary secrecy, to borrow from "My Lord Chichester's lady," because, as her husband is careful to explain, the remedies recommended by her physicians can do nothing, "no, not so much as against melancholy thoughts". But the egg was a disappointment, a mere vulgar counterfeit with no power of magic or mystery, "a German stone, such as are commonly sold in London for five shillings apiece"; so this changeling was returned with

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all due ceremony to my Lord Chichester, and Anne's "voilent headaches" continued. "She complains every day very much; though, thank God, she comes abroad and walks an hour for exercise daily: she hath the prettiest nurse and the ugliest midwife I ever saw." This letter is written from Kensington, as are all those of their early married life; it is dated the 21st day of December, 1658, and is notable as being the last in which Edward Conway speaks with any concern for his wife's health or any interest in her welfare. Her child was born on the 6th of February, 1659, was baptised Heneage after the father she had never known, and died two years after, in London, of small-pox. He was buried in the family vault at Arrow, and it seems to have been after his death that Anne, possibly with some idea of not leaving the little body, made her permanent home at Ragley. It must have seemed a dark world to Anne Conway after the loss of her child, and even Ragley, with its shady walks and woods and hills, a prison rather than a home, with grief for gaoler. The Ragley she knew was not the Ragley of to-day, but the "stately gatehouse of stone imbattailed like a castle" overlooking the valley of the Alne and the Arrow that John Rous had built for himself somewhere back in the early

years of the second Richard, and added to it a "Dwelling-house" by the King's gracious permission. Henry More speaks of "the solemness of the place," of "solitudes where it was possible to lose the rest of the world," and perhaps it was he who taught her to love her home, as he most certainly tried to teach her to bear with patience the affliction that had come to her. Some of his comfort sounds cold, but when he wrote that such pain would not be sent without its antidote of consolation he was making a truer prophecy than he knew. To this unending pain Anne was to owe the greatest happiness of her life, her lasting friendship with that wandering genius, the Baron Francis Mercury Van Helmont.

Even in that seventeenth century when adventurers, poets and other picturesque vagabonds were common as blackberries in a Hampshire hedge, the most skilled of the makers of books could hardly have imagined a more romantic figure than Van Helmont the younger. The son of John Baptist Van Helmont, the noted founder of the Iatro-chemical school, he inherited all his father's mental gifts, but lacked his father's balance of character. A redoubtable Jack-of-all-trades, he had dabbled by turns in chemistry, alchemy, painting, engraving, not despising even the meaner arts of weaving and boot-making. A

born wayfarer, whose restless foot kept time with his restless heart, he wandered about Europe for some years as the friend and companion of a horde of gipsies, and doubtless learned from them many a lesson. From gipsy father to gipsy son was handed down some of the secret wisdom of ancient Egypt, and Francis Van Helmont, sitting idle by the camp-fires in lonely places on windless nights while his strange hosts told the stars, gathered together a riper store of odd, out-of-the-way knowledge than he had ever done when, as a boy, he studied deep at the celebrated University of Louvain. Those wandering years, and they were the years of his youth, must have cut deep into a mind sensitive to receive any and every impression, a mind that found itself as much at home in a philosopher's study as at the cobbler's bench. He might have stayed content with his gipsy friends on the wayside, if the unsatisfied spirit within him had not driven him back once again to the life of cities. Amsterdam was then a famous seat of learning, and here he determined to study the Cabala, until, filled with the dreams of the alchemist, he believed he had at last discovered the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life. It was characteristic of the man that he made no attempt to put his supposed discovery

to any immediate use. Like Anne Conway, he loved learning for learning's sake, and brooded over his ideas and theories as a collector broods over his rare curiosities, with no thought of their ultimate sale ; but when he felt Amsterdam had nothing more to teach him, he tramped on to Rome. It was an unwise change, for the Inquisition was still powerful, and a traveller who not only claimed to have discovered the elixir of life, but indulged over-freely in loose speculations on the transmigration of the soul, was judged to be an undesirable guest in the City of Saints. Some devoted pupil may have warned the Master of his danger ; for Van Helmont hurriedly left Rome, fearful for his life, and passed in disguise through Germany and Holland into England. His faith in the elixir can have been but faint, or he surely would have stayed to test its virtues in the Question Chamber of the Grand Council.

He was in the best years of his life, half-way between forty and fifty, when at last his wanderings brought him into Warwickshire. Henry More tells us Van Helmont was first called to Ragley as a consultant, and went there full of hope and belief that he would cure of her mysterious illness this great English lady famed for her learning. He came with the weight of his father's reputation added to his own, and

haloed with the romance of a vagabond past; and though the elixir could not medicine Anne Conway to health, the man himself charmed away some of her pain with his presence. The manners of the times when the castles of the great lords were still filled with retinues of gently born dependents, made it easy for him to stay on with her, not only as her private physician but her constant companion and most faithful friend; and so began the story of this seventeenth-century Abailard and Heloïse, a story that only came to an end with the death of one of the lovers. For of Francis Van Helmont's devotion to Anne Conway there is no doubt, only in this strange love story the passion was forgotten. The life of the body and the lust of the flesh could have had but little temptation for the woman whose almost every day was a torture of pain; and the man who loved her was content, with her, to look forward to that after-world of the spirit in which she had so absolute and so unshaken a belief.

After the ups and downs of his varied experiences, the years spent at Ragley must have seemed to Francis Van Helmont as a long-drawn-out well-ordered dream, and he moved through them like a man in a dream, fearful lest any ill-considered action of his should blur its likeness to truth.

In those days many were well content so to live ; to garner into barns ; watch the heavy fruit ripen on the lichened walls of their old gardens ; see their flocks and kine increase in the pleasant pasture lands ; and thus try to blot out all memory of the troubled times when the war-trumpets were sounding from end to end of England. Van Helmont, brought into the quiet heart of those Warwickshire woods that held so dear a place among the pious memories of Henry More, became a changed man and, as though held by the spell of some white magic, let the days slip by with never a wish to wander, while the shady walks at Ragley heard many quotations in unknown tongues from learned authors, and much vain questioning as to the deep mysteries of death, when Anne paced the paths with the man ignorant people thought to be a wizard. Sometimes Henry More was with them, and, if we may believe him, the sick woman amazed them both with the depth of her learning and the breadth of her knowledge. Other guests came to Ragley, guests most unwelcome to Henry More, and hardly, one must suppose, the companions Van Helmont would have chosen—Fox, Penn, and Robert Barclay, the chief founders of the new Society of Friends. But their teaching had a strange attraction for Anne, and from

Ragley there came to Henry More in his quiet study at Cambridge long, closely written letters that he must have found it hard to answer. For in one she asks him "Whether God did create the matter for the enjoyment of souls, since they fell by it?" in another, "Upon supposition most of the angels fell, why did they not all assume bodies together?" and again, "How the souls of beasts and plants came into bodies?" Strange, unpractical questions these seem to us now, of no more value than the withered leaves of a dead rose, but they were living realities of infinite moment to the woman who asked and the man who honestly did his best to answer them. We can read them to-day, all these curious explanations and elaborate arguments that failed to convince the pupil who could juggle with words as easily as the master, and had learnt that words would not content her. Like many another who has fed the brain and starved the body she longed at last for some clear, definite, statement of faith, something as easy to understand as a child's idea of heaven; the Quakers she knew were a simple people with but a simple creed, and, tired of arguments and orthodoxy, she determined to join herself to the then despised sect.

When Henry More heard of her conversion, he burst into tears, but finding that his pleadings

were powerless to unsettle her convictions, he comforted himself with thinking her change of religion due to "a love of quiet necessitated by her illness". To Edward Conway it was an unending grievance, and he never loses an opportunity of speaking contemptuously of his wife's affection for the Quakers—"an unpleasing sort of people, silent, sullen and of a reserved disposition"; but to Van Helmont, himself an expert in mental vagaries, Anne's conversion to the faith of the English Quietists caused but little surprise, still less annoyance. His only desire was to ease her of her pain, and if she found one form of religious exercise more soothing than another, he welcomed her change of faith just as he had welcomed the coming of Valentine Greatrakes, the famous Irish "Stroker".

Greatrakes was no common person; his name in 1665 was in every one's mouth as a miracle-worker, a man sent from God. It was after Van Helmont had spent three years at Ragley that, probably at his suggestion, Henry More urged upon Edward Conway to invite this Irishman over to try his cure upon Anne. Like Van Helmont, Greatrakes must have heard of Lady Conway's strange and mystifying illness long before he received, through Sir George Rawdon, the bidding to come as an honoured guest to

Ragley, on his mission of healing. He was then in Dublin at the very summit of his success, and whether or not among his many gifts was the power of divination, one thing is certain, that he was most unwilling to try his skill on Anne Conway. There is no doubt of his honesty, for he had never yet taken a fee for any one of his wonder-workings; but though the bidding was sent in the summer of 1665, it was not until the January of the following year that he consented to set sail for England. There is a dignified letter from Greatrakes to Sir George Rawdon, dated the 9th day of December, 1665, in which he claims the payment of no less a sum than one hundred and fifty-five pounds of English money in return for the voyage he is about to make. "I know it will seem strange to all that know me, that I who never received pension or gratuity from any man hitherto, should propose anything of a reward to myself now; but I hope when it's rightly considered how that I run the hazards of the enraged seas, the winter, leave all my concerns in this time of settlement,[1] and forego the comfort of my family, it will not seem strange; for no one can be just to his family that runs such dangers without consideration, which barely could not move me to run such a course, but that I hope in God I may be an

[1] A reference to some business then in hand.

instrument in his hands to free the lady from those distempers which she labors under. Several and most that ever came affected with those dolors her ladyship is tormented with, all having been cured." That Greatrakes should first hesitate and then dictate terms must have astounded Edward Conway, but he paid the fee without question or cavil, as that year even he could afford to be generous. For had he not, in spite of the indignant remonstrance of the "Lieutenants of the City," who even sent a letter to the King to beg him to stay Lord Conway's hand; in spite, too, of the angry protests of the magistrates; deliberately and of set purpose despoiled Conway Castle of the lead-work and roofing, thereby leaving it the bare ruin it now stands? The castle was the pride of the county, and in his father's time was said to be "more princely and pleasant" than any "save Windsor Castle". But the father was a man of taste, a lover of books (his library was noted in 1610), the son was a lover of money; so the order was given, and the castle roofings and spoutings and defences were shipped with all haste to Ireland, because these Lieutenants and Magistrates and other interfering and mischievous persons had made the sale of the lead in Conway town impossible even to my Lord Conway. It was doubtless from a part of the

price of this dishonour that Sir George Rawdon paid to Greatrakes the only fee he ever took in the whole course of his life.

It was a wonderful journey that Greatrakes made from Bristol to Ragley, through the cold and the storms of an English winter. All along the way sick men, women and children were brought to him; he healed them with his touch, and their blessings followed him. The time of his coming must have seemed long to Anne Conway, for each new story brought to her of a wondrous cure filled her heart afresh with hope. At last the waiting came to an end, and Greatrakes was made welcome to Ragley by Edward Conway himself, who a fortnight later wrote at some length to Sir George Rawdon to tell him this new treatment was a failure even as the old had been. "Mr. Greatrakes hath been here a fortnight to-morrow, and my wife is not the better for him; very few others have failed under his hands of many hundreds that he hath touched in these parts. I must confess that before his arrival, I did not believe the tenth part of those things which I have been an eye-witness of, and several others of as accurate a judgment as any in this kingdom, who are come hither out of curiosity, do acknowledge the truth of his operations. This morning the Bishop of

Gloucester recommended to me a prebend's son in his diocese to be brought to him for a leprosy from head to foot, which hath been judged incurable above ten years, and in my chamber he cured him perfectly; that is, from a moist humour, 'twas immediately dried up and began to fall off; the itching was quite gone, and the heat of it taken away. The youth was transported to admiration. The Dean saw this as well as myself, but it is not the hundredth part, and I am confident the least of forty that we have seen, among which are many pleasant passages done purposely to satisfy our curiosity and experience."

What Anne's feelings were if she were one of those who watched these "many pleasant passages" it would be hard to tell, and Edward Conway seems to have been too deeply interested in the scientific value of the healing to trouble over-much about the one cure Greatrakes failed to make. He goes on to say: "I am far from thinking them miracles, or that his cures are at all miraculous; but I believe it is by a *sanative virtue* and a *natural efficiency*, which extends not to all diseases, but is much more proper and effectual to some than to others, as he doth also dispatch some with a great deal of ease, and others not without a great deal of paines." When virtue was going out of him this "natural effici-

ency" came from the healer's body with a sweet smell as of violets, and this fancied likeness to the body of Christ that, legend tells us, gave forth most rare and precious scents, must have helped greatly to increase the patient's faith. Greatrakes stayed on yet a full week longer at Ragley before he would own himself beaten; then he sorrowfully took his leave of Anne Conway, and went to London to show by Royal Command his skill before the King. Whether his gift was but for a season, or whether the taking of money had shaken the man's belief in his own powers, the Warwickshire miracles were to be almost the last of his triumphs and Anne Conway but the first of many disappointments. His fame died away as quickly as it had arisen, and he must often have wished he had never let himself be tempted to cross the "enraged seas," and so lose his reputation for the Divine gift of healing.

Greatrakes' failure was a bitter disappointment to Henry More, whose belief had grown with the wonders he had witnessed, but in Anne hope was hard to kill. She made a journey to France to see the doctors of whose science she had heard so much, and begged them "to open her head and let out the pain". What doctor of to-day could resist so strange a chance of increasing knowledge, even though the result were

certain death? But the physicians of France refused to make the trial, all save one who effected a slight incision in the jugular arteries that gave her no relief. So leaving hope behind her, Anne Conway came back to Ragley determined to follow Henry More's advice "to give up making any more trials and betake herself wholly to God". And faithfully she followed it. She took up the old studies again, worked uninterruptedly at the abstruse questions that have puzzled even wiser heads than hers, and made herself yet dearer every day by her sweetness and her patience to those who loved her. Only once in all the pain-racked years did she make any complaint of her sufferings. "I had hoped to die, but now fear I shall yet remain alive in my living tomb"; sad words that long after, with even more reason, Heine was to say of his worn body.

But Anne was not to leave her "living tomb" until the 23rd day of February, 1679, after twenty-eight years of marriage to a man she could not love, and seventeen years of close and constant companionship with the man who loved her. To the last her charm never left her, and to all save her husband she grew dearer with every year that passed. Even the two men whose lives had been so strangely bound with hers in this

trinity of the mind must have felt it vain to regret her, when together on that waking February morning they watched her find the long-desired easement to all her pain. Yet one of the two found it hard to part with the worn-out garment of her soul, and so the story of her burying is a strange romance. At the time of his wife's death Edward Conway was away in Ireland, but in a letter written little more than a year before, there is a hint of jealousy at Van Helmont's influence over Anne—the dull smouldering anger of a slow-thinking man. "Mons. Van Helmont is governour of that flock (the Quakers). These and all of that Society have free access to my wife, but I believe Dr. More, though he was in the house all the last summer, did not see her above twice or thrice." Perhaps it was this jealousy that kept him from Ragley, a fear of finding another master in the house; but his absence was Van Helmont's excuse for the manner of Anne Conway's burying. That the husband might look once again upon his wife's face Van Helmont used all his art of chemistry to preserve Anne's body, and then placed it in a coffin with a glass over the face until Lord Conway should come back to Warwickshire to take his tardy farewell of her, on the 17th of April, when at last she was buried.

Here ends the story, so far as it now can be gathered together, of Anne Conway. Her forgotten beauty has gone the way of "unforgotten Queens," and what now remains of the profound learning that once amazed some of the wisest heads in Europe? In 1690 there was printed in Amsterdam a Latin translation of a short philosophical treatise; two years later it was turned back into its native English, and published in London under the title "*The Principles of the most Ancient and Modern Philosophy, concerning God, Christ and the Creatures, viz.*, of Spirit and Matter in general; whereby may be resolved all those Problems or Difficulties which neither by the School nor Common Modern Philosophy, nor by the Cartesian, Hobbesian or Spinosian could be discussed. Being a little Treatise published since the Author's death, translated out of the English into Latin, with Annotations taken from the Ancient Philosophy of the Hebrews". The Latin translation was made by Van Helmont, who left England immediately after Anne's death and went to Hanover. Here he met Leibnitz, and so impressed his imagination with the wisdom and learning of the dead woman that he ever after spoke of her with almost as great a reverence as did Henry More. It is Leibnitz who says that the author of the little

book with the long title was Anne Conway, but apart from this all her reputation for profound and extraordinary learning rests upon the loving testimony of Henry More and Francis Van Helmont. How far in More's case the master was indebted to the pupil we cannot tell; but in his work there are traces of inspiration suggesting an unacknowledged partnership for which the prefaces and the praise are probably, in part, a payment of his gratitude.

But who now reads the *Conjectura Cabbalistica* written at her instigation, if not from the actual notes she had made? Who now cares for the abstruse reasonings, the abstract discussions, that seemed to the three friends who met together at Ragley as the very bones and sinews of life? The singer of some careless song, or the woman whose loveliness inspired it, is better remembered than these learned ones. For they lived in a world apart, and forgot that outside their "pleasant solitude" was a world as well worth thinking about; they read in the dead tongues, and did not know that the living tongue spoken by the common people had made an even greater literature. Though the lands owned by the Conways stretched almost to Stratford-on-Avon it is doubtful whether Anne had ever so much as heard of Shakespeare, still less read one

of his plays. "Ignorance is better than Pride," so she had written in pencil on the fly-leaf of her paper note-book, for it was her favourite saying; but she would not have believed, had she been told, that often ignorance is better than learning. Yet the "spinsters and the knitters in the sun," the women who nursed their children at their cottage doors, the men who tended her sheep and her kine, the gardeners who cared for those rare seeds and plants that Edward Conway had sent to him from Lisbon, all these might have taught Anne something of the wisdom that never dies or is forgotten because it has its roots in the heart of the tree of life. But she never learned it. Her head was buried in books and, like the famous Brilliana Conway before her, she "loved them best in a foreign tongue". If her child had lived she might have grown wiser; have learned for his sake songs of "silly sooth" and old fairy legends, and forgotten for a time those sad problems that it passes the wit of man to solve. And then she might herself have written a book to be remembered.

Instead, her learning has died with her, and she lies near her child in the vault at Arrow, while so fearful was she of the sin of pride that on her plain lead coffin are only these two words "Quaker lady". The Conway vaults are now

sealed, and curious eyes may no longer look on it; but one who was privileged to enter the day before they were closed for ever, says that the mark was distinctly visible where the square of lead was fixed, on the day of Anne's burial, over the little window Van Helmont had placed in her coffin lid. Perhaps her lead coffin was made at Stratford-on-Avon, in that old timbered house where the dismal trade flourished until the last century, and where even to-day the outlines of the moulds may be traced. For great people in Warwickshire went there for their last furnishing, for those costly lead coffins that set them apart in death from the common people, even as the great carved pews had done when, in their living pride, they had worshipped God in their churches.

ON LIVING ALONE.

ON LIVING ALONE.

"We are losing to-day many good habits, and among them is the habit of solitude." I was half asleep in the corner of a railway-carriage, and a man in the opposite corner was speaking to his friend, who made no answer but merely nodded his head in doubtful assent: then the train came suddenly to a stand-still, and they stepped out on to an empty, wind-swept wayside station, leaving me alone. I had heard nothing but these few words, spoken by a middle-aged, middle-class man who looked as though he had seen something of life—not the best of it, yet not the worst; and I began to wonder what more he had said, and why he thought we were losing the habit of solitude.

The train was hurrying through a level tract of desolate country, long stretches of flat meadow-land with a narrow sluggish reed-choked river winding like some sleepy snake through the dark, mournful fields; and a cold, wet mist crept up to the windows as the sullen daylight faded without

one line of red, purple or gold to relieve the greyness of the coming night. Every time I pass through this line of country (and I know it well) I am struck anew with a sense of its dreary loneliness. It may well be that our land, the "little land" William Morris loved, is over-full, and her sons and daughters, like their adventuring forefathers, must needs go across the seas to find a better and a bigger England. Yet, looking out through the growing darkness upon this silent country-side, it seemed as though here a man might live out the length of his days in a solitariness more complete, profound and undisturbed than ever Thoreau found in his wood. In the midst of the fields, at one point of the journey, is a deserted church, still roofed and possibly weather-tight, but with doors and windows boarded in—a house of God from which the Shekinah has departed. There is no footpath across the field, no graveyard, no hint even of a distant village; only the church with its massive tower standing desolate in a desolate land, and, a little to the left, the ruin of a large, grey gabled house, now knee-deep in stagnant water, roofless and falling to decay, but still noble and beautiful in its severity of outline. I do not know their history; I only know that whenever I see them, in summer sunshine or winter's dulness, in the "sweet o'

the year" or the heavy stillness of autumn, few things oppress me with so deep a melancholy as this church without worshippers, and this house whose only tenant is the vagrant wind. Perhaps it is because the land has been cultivated for so long that it, too, has become a very grave of hope. Patient men, patient horses, have trodden it for generations, and it is only virgin soil, barren of memories, that can cheer the heart of man with promise of fulfilment and satisfaction.

And this is why, in those far-distant days that some of us name the Golden, and others the Dark Ages, men were content to live apart and were happy in their loneliness. Some of them were called saints, for they set their hearts high above the needs and pleasures of our common life; others wise philosophers, for they sought to gain a better knowledge of hidden truths; others again were only simple folk who cared for the dumb beasts and the singing birds, and found them better company than their human-kind. In every civilised land there were these great wastes of wild country, and news came slowly, shaping itself as the tongue of the traveller willed, into tidings of grave moment and high import, or else into the lighter gossip that floats along the highways of the world, and, however they may have affected to despise it, must have been not wholly

unwelcome to these dwellers in solitary places. For the traveller wandering in search of learning, or of wealth, or because he carried a restless heart, was the only link that bound these exiles to the life of cities, and when he had left them, they may perhaps have known some moment of regret for the fuller existence they had, of choice, foresworn. But the mood would pass, almost before the traveller had disappeared beyond the horizon of forest or hillside, and once again the wilderness would blossom as a rose for those who had here made their dwellings. Though the heart of man is changeless, yet the outward fashions of his living, and the changes through which from age to age both nations and peoples must pass, are manifold; even our skies to-day would be strangely unfamiliar to those old Northmen who, two thousand nine hundred and nine years before the birth of Christ, saw with naked eyes the light of the southern cross shine over our darker hemisphere.

Certain virtues are lacking in us to-day that were a part of the very web and fibre of the human life of the past; virtues we have outgrown and for which we have seemingly no longer any use; virtues so simple that no one thought it worth the while to give them names. They were part of a man's soul-fittings, and without them he would

have gone forth unarmed into the battle; but now we have lost them we are beginning to wonder what they really were, those virtues that were the heritage of the men of old time. Perhaps the best answer is that, properly speaking, they were not virtues at all, any more than beauty is a virtue, or a soft voice, or a strong arm. They were rather birth-gifts, now withheld from us by the wise spirits that watch (or so the old stories tell us) over the cradles of new-born souls, because they know the conditions of life have changed, and they must bring us other gifts more fitted to the measure of our needs. For of what use is it to dower a man with a brave heart, when all he needs is a calculating, crafty mind, so that he may be able to outwit his comrades in the struggle for daily bread, or of what use to fill him with a delicate sense of honour when he has to earn this bread in the mire of the market-place? Of what use to grant to him a generous spirit, when he must fight ceaselessly for bare standing-room among an ever-thickening crowd, or of what use to give him a soul that loves the peace found in silence, when all the green corners of the earth are being built upon to satisfy the Socialist's dream of a life lived in common? So from most of us, the wise spirits have withheld the old-world birth-gifts, that we may learn to be content and

grow ever more closely in touch with our environment (as scientists tell us plants and animals do), through a change in ourselves; a change so subtle we have not even guessed at it, until some chance word, some unforeseen happening, shows us our real nature, as that one line in the love poem showed to Francesca the heart of Paolo, and to Paolo the heart of Francesca.

There are very few of us to-day who care to live alone, for, as the man in the corner of the railway-carriage said, we are losing the habit of solitude. If any one should doubt this, let him go to the busiest house agent he knows and ask what is the state of trade. And the answer will be that all the big houses are being turned into clubs and all the little houses pulled down that great blocks of flats may be built where people can live as far as possible the life in common. The home life is becoming, if it has not already become, a legend. It was, we say, a selfish life, and a man's line of vision was narrowed when he looked out at the world through windows that were his own exclusive property, and closed a door that no one else had the right to open, upon his joys and upon his sorrows, or even hid his door and his windows from the sight of careless eyes, by setting a close hedge or building a high wall round the house where he alone was master.

Thus man once loved to live, but the idea was born, or so we say, of a misconception. It was thought in those far-away days that quiet meant peace, and that peace was only another and perhaps a more beautiful name for happiness. Now we look at life differently, and, summed up briefly, our ideal of happiness is noise, crowds and constant movement. Only the invalid and the imbecile may take their fill of ease; the rest of us must hurry along the road doing something, no matter how well or how ill, if only so be we are up and doing. Moreover, we must work, as the convicts do, in company, and in full sight of an approving or a disapproving world; because those who live alone and work alone, learn to think alone, and this is a high crime in our active bustling age. But have we not lost, too, the very habit of thinking? for thought needs silence, solitude and leisure; all the conditions of life we have learned to despise, all that is forbidden in the grimy gospel of labour. In the old days, man would withdraw himself from the world for a season that he might commune with his spirit, and the quaint phraseology holds a deeper inner meaning, for it recognises the truth that man and his spirit live too often apart. Held together by ties that only death can break, they know but little of each other. Who is this

strange second self of whose presence beside us and within us we are dimly conscious ? that sometimes controls but more often resists our actions, and of whose unspoken judgment we are half afraid ; this guest and companion of the body, who though one with us is yet a stranger to us, who knows us, but of whose nature we are in doubt, whose very existence we are even tempted to deny, who may not reveal itself to us unless we be alone. For it has been well said that in darkness the eyes are opened and in silence the heart speaks, and those who know best the mystery of life live alone, having learned to see through the shadows and to hear through the silence.

It is a strange saying that to know life we must stand aloof from all we call living ; must stop our ears to the voices of men and women, must close our eyes to the world that works and goes a-holy-daying. But yet it is not more strange than another dark saying men have either accepted or denied for hard on two thousand years—" He that seeketh his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life shall find it ". After all, it is only a question of what we mean by life and living ; of whether we hold by the body or by the spirit. To-day if we think of the spirit at all, it is with a mild, pitying compassion, as of something we once be-

lieved in, but now know to be made but out of the thin substance of a morning dream. We are dominated by the sense of the body, by its needs, demands and insistencies ; we spare no pains to improve it, to prolong its existence, and the prospect of its slow decay is so hateful to us that we willingly work ourselves to death sooner than face the season of peace, of meditation and of rest that we call old age. And since we are agreed that we must live out to the full every single minute of our lives, we do not live alone. We need movement, excitement, constant companionship, because—we are afraid. We are afraid of that other enforced companionship of the spirit we have done our best to deny ; we are afraid of the silence, because in the silence men have heard voices ; we are afraid of the darkness, because in the darkness men have seen visions, and we, in our foolishness, we will have none of them. So we try to persuade ourselves that a solitary life is a selfish life, and go about the world telling each other we were sent into it, not to shun our fellow-men but rather to make the most of their company. " How can any one do good," we ask triumphantly, " if he shuts himself up and lives a life apart " ? for doing good, as we understand it to-day, invariably means some aggressively active form of philanthropy. We have a deep-rooted

idea that every one should live by rule ; that we should have a common nursery, a common school-room, a common roof-tree, and die at last in the common ward of a hospital, while science speaks a parting benediction over our heads.

The worst of every idea honestly held is, that something can always be said in its favour. Certain virtues, not necessarily the highest, can only reach to the fulness of perfection in the sunshine of admiration and praise, and the child who has learned the rough-and-tumble lessons of the common nursery must needs be self-reliant ; if for lack of talent or opportunity he should fail to make his mark in the world, he will generally manage to hold his own. And this is why we sometimes pity the child who grows up companionless, as we pity the men and women who live alone, not knowing that our sympathy is more often than not misplaced. A wise old commentator, who had read all his life the works of great writers and tried to bring them within the comprehension of the ignorant, has told us that "Silent men are kings, for they rule over a great country where none can follow them," and the silent people are for the most part happy as well as wise ; because it is a law of being that we live alone, and if we fight against nature we do but bruise and break ourselves in vain. The crowd we call company,

the noise in which we try to drown our fears, doubts and perplexities, the struggle we mistake for life, may not fill our hearts or silence the questions we ask ourselves half fearfully, when we lie awake in the strange, lonely hour that divides the night from the morning. Balzac, in the wonderful study he has called *Lost Illusions*, makes both his hero and his heroine to be lonely people. The moral, for like all great artists he writes for truth's sake, is that only the lonely can ever know the heartbreak of a lost illusion, for they have developed the life of the spirit and know the exquisite pain and the exquisite joy—so alike that in their very essence they are interchangeable—of waking dreams.

It is not good to begin our journey with eyes that can see nothing but reality, or what we call reality. We must believe when we are children in fairies and kindly magic, in friendly stars, talking flowers and the pathway of the rainbow, so that when we grow older we may believe—and this is a far harder saying—that death is but life, and darkness light. There is no hope at all for us if, like the legendary chicken who denied the very existence of the egg though the shell was still sticking, we begin by doubting the power of the spirit; of the "dear enticer" to whom the Roman emperor wrote a sweeter, sadder farewell than

ever lover penned to lost mistress. We may put the candles out and go to bed, for life can then be nothing better than "a tale told by an idiot," from which any healthy-minded man must needs shrink. If instead of a wiser self, we carry within us merely a senseless corpse, of what use is it for us that the sun shall shine, the winds whisper along the tall tree-tops, and the earth yield up her increase? On the journey that has no ending, we keep step with a faithful, constant companion and friend, to whom we give a different name just as the mood takes us. Sometimes, like the Roman emperor, we make use of the little language of love; sometimes we speak of the spirit or soul that sojourns with us for a while. The name by which we call it is of no great moment so long as we recognise the vitality of its presence, and when we do, we are no longer alone. This was the comrade given into our keeping at our birth of whose company we were never to tire, until the day of revelation and of wonder comes, and we learn that this is the ME in us who shall live and triumph when the body has dropped and fallen to decay.

These are the truths that are learned in silence, and this is the faith we have foresworn; and so I say in losing the habit of solitude we have lost an old-time virtue and one that we should mourn, as

we mourn all lost sweetnesses, fragrances and innocencies, as some thing of rare value. "While I have thought I was learning to live, I have been learning how to die," so the old writer marked the old mystery down in his commonplace book, when the sand was running low in the hour-glass. We die alone. Is it not wise to learn to live alone, and to seek the company of this guest of the body that we may know something of the way we are going, and not be afraid of the darkness of night?

ON GROWING OLD.

ON GROWING OLD.

Autumn has many heralds to trumpet bravely its near approach, but not one who brings a message so sure, so certain, so impossible to mistake, as the first faint smell of mushrooms. I was walking by the river-side at the close of an oppressively hot July day, when like "a whisper down the field" came suddenly the smell of mushrooms—fresh, earthy, pleasing, yet withal sad to the nostrils, a warning and foreshadowing of the death of summer. There is no other smell in the whole world that can in any way compare with it; yet to distinguish it a man must have lived long in the country and have learned to love the subtle scents that mark the growth and decay of the year. City-bred folk might easily miss the significance of this curious yet indescribable incense of the fields, or might even fail to detect it, in the strange and unaccustomed intoxication of breathing fresh, pure air. But it strikes across the haze and heat like a flash-light, and all at once we feel the chill and desolation of the autumn upon us.

How many books have been written, how many sermons preached, how many ballads sung, upon the melancholy theme of old age! How many writers in the pages of how many magazines have not discoursed pleasantly enough on this same subject, treating it lightly or seriously according to the natural bent of their fancy, yet not without an uneasy consciousness that, even as they write, behind the chair stands waiting the companion by whose side they must make the end of the journey! And if so much has been said, why say any more? But the last word has not yet been spoken, and never can be spoken, so long as there is youth left in the world to dread old age, or old age left to regret its lost youth.

Sensible people (who are generally very tiresome people) often spend the best part of their youth in making due and solemn preparation for age—for the days of enforced inaction, of feebleness, and of lack of interest, to which they look forward with a certain dogged courage. Happily they are few in the land. For "to lay by against a rainy day" is one of those excellent pieces of advice that no one ever follows if he can possibly help it, men and women being, for the most part, hopeful creatures who are continually counting upon some fair wind eventually bringing their ships to shore, and who determine to enjoy life while

they can in spite of the jaundiced warnings of misers and misanthropes. So they deliberately shut their eyes to the slow on-coming of age, and, as the years pass by, refuse to look back lest they should be forced to realise how many milestones now lie behind them, thinking, as children do, that they can so cheat Time.

Ever since the world began, man has sought to grind his axe on this same problem of old age. Socrates, with his devout thanks for the strangling of the wild beasts, and his earnest advice to the young men to seek often the company and companionship of the old, that they may learn the exact nature of the road by which they too must travel, gives us the wisest and certainly the most dignified counsel as to the best method of approach. But then, unlike death, old age is not a universal heritage, and it is perhaps because of its very uncertainty that age has always had an almost irresistible fascination for all save the very young.

It is possible that to us old age will never come; we say it with a light heart as we begin the journey along the blossom-scented highways of a world that never forgets to renew its youth for every fresh wayfarer. In those early blossoming days all goes well with us, and we look with pity upon the strange figures—bent, wrinkled,

so unlike our own brave selves—that are marching, with lagging feet, into the shadows, while we laugh incredulously at the warning voices that would fain tell us: "As thou art, so was I; as I am, so shalt thou be". Not for us the bent back, not for us the bowed head, not for us the slow uncertain steps; we will be wiser than all those who have gone before us. Sometimes a doubt may assail us when we read the writings that great men have left behind them; the noble resignation of Lucretius, the unbending logic of Aurelius, the practical acquiescence in the natural law and order of events to be found in Sir Thomas Browne. But we mostly shrink from a too personal application of the wisdom of the past, and agree to consider age as an enemy lying in ambush from whom we may yet, by a stroke of luck, be able to make good our escape.

In the early half of the last century it was very much the fashion to affect to treat old age as a joke. Allusions to the first grey hair never failed to amuse an early Victorian audience, though there may perhaps have been some bitterness in the laughter that professed to find in the padded waistcoats of old gentlemen and the ill-fitting wigs of old ladies a most excellent jest. There is a certain vulgarity to be found in some of the Victorian writers when they speak of old age; and though

Dickens makes his elderly characters by turns kind-hearted, absurd, charitable or vicious, he will never, under any circumstances, allow them the grace of dignity. And yet without true dignity old age is detestable; for dignity, stateliness, large-mindedness—all the grandest of the virtues—are just as surely its rightful prerogatives as beauty, energy, hope and high spirits are the birth-gifts of youth. I once knew an old lady who was the wisest and best of her sex, as well as one of the most beautiful, and to know her was in itself an education, and to spend any time in her mere presence a privilege. She came of a great race that had given its sons to the service of their country in many ways—as statesmen, as seamen, and as soldiers—and from her gracious bearing and old-world courtesy might be learnt the best traditions of the past. Here was old age neither pitiable nor ridiculous, but beautiful and, in a measure, awe-inspiring, for though she had lived three and ninety years, her eye was not dimmed nor her back bowed; it would have been impossible for the most hardy of early Victorian humorists to read a jest into the stately ending of so stately a life.

To-day our attitude towards old age has greatly changed. We no longer pretend to treat it as a hackneyed joke, but instead have agreed to ignore

it. No one is old, simply because no one can afford to be. The kingdom has been given over to the young, and age must borrow youth's clothing if it would still hold its own in the council chamber or the market-place. There has been a wide-world revision of the old standard of moral weights and measures, and experience, caution, and a wide outlook on life have been judged to be lighter in the scales than vanity itself. So who can blame old age for stealing a mask and trotting after youth as fast as its enfeebled limbs will carry it?—dancing when it would fain sit still, running when it should walk; above all, listening when it ought to speak. There is nothing new in this implicit and even pathetic reliance on the untried judgment of youth: there is nothing new under the sun, said the saddest philosopher the world has ever known. Rehoboam, when he succeeded to the vast possessions that his father Solomon had bequeathed to him—to the ships of Tarshish with their rich cargoes of gold and silver, ivory, and apes and peacocks, to the spices, precious stones and algum trees that came from Sheba, and to the great throne of ivory on which Solomon had sat to deliver judgment—rejected the counsel of the old men and so brought about his own ruin.

I wonder whether any one has ever had either the honesty or the courage to chronicle the very

day and hour when he was conscious of the first hint of the on-coming of old age. How does it come to us, this autumn sense of sadness? Is it when we realise that we are no longer in active sympathetic touch with the latest intellectual theories and literary fashions, and distrust the value of younger men's opinions; or is it when we speak confidently before a young audience and are greeted with respectful silence? We have been accustomed to criticism, to contradiction, to all the rough-and-tumble of friendly equality: in that convincing though unconvinced silence, bespeaking the tolerant half-pitying respect youth shows to age, we surely smell the first faint far-off scent of the mushrooms. Or perhaps it came with the first cooling of hot enthusiasm on the day we forgot to be angry; when it did not seem worth while to fill our hearts with wrath (however great the wrong done to us), since nothing mattered any longer, because the days and months and years pass so quickly that forgetting grows easy. Or else, maybe, when we cease to trouble over-much about the future, and instead look back upon the past and find that it was very good, as all the old people we have ever known have done before us: on that day, even if we do not know it, we smell the mushrooms.

Some people, it is said, never grow old. They carry a young heart with them all the length of the travelling road, their feet never falter, nor do they ever cast regretful backward glances towards the hazily golden days of youth. But this, in very truth, is the uttermost perfection of art—a consummate piece of acting that deceives every one except the players themselves. For they know only too well every stone on the trodden highway, they have counted all the milestones, and the burden of the vanished years lies heavier upon the shoulders they still strive gallantly to keep upright than upon the bent backs that claim our half-contemptuous pity.

"When we are old we can give happiness, but we may not take it." It is this same power of creating the happiness of others that has given birth to the legend of the young heart carried in the old body, a legend as fabulous as the alchemist's elixir of youth. The so-called young heart is the oldest, and often the saddest heart of all, but it has always had the grace to remember; to store the vision of vanished sunrisings that it may learn to read some measure of hope into the daily sun-settings. Every seven years we are changed, as science, the only gospel that can now find any large following, has taught us, but who ever grieves over the lost atoms? So

gradually have these subtle changes come, that we have been trapped unawares, and, before we know it, are on as easy terms of friendship with these new selves of ours as ever we were with the old. But there comes a day at last when we realise that all is not with us as it used to be. Time has been busy taking toll from us at every halting-place, and, like the woman in the fairy tale, we find that we have been forced to give him the brightness of our eyes, the blackness of our hair, and the whiteness of our teeth, in return for his royal permission to travel yet a little farther along the dusty road : it is this stage of the journey that has drawn from poets, in all times, the finest of lamentations, and from philosophers and preachers the chilliest of comfort. Kings' daughters have sat down in the dust to bewail their lost beauty, brave men have turned coward in regretting their lost strength, and in our hearts we have wept with them, knowing that for us, too, waits this undesired, unloved and unlovely companion, to sit by our side, share our uprisings and downsittings, and never leave us until the very end.

But is not our whole conception of old age a mistake? We begin by treating it as an enemy, as something to be dreaded and avoided, instead of frankly recognising it as but a further development of the strange mental experiences that make

the warp and woof of our lives. And this is especially true of to-day, when we are content to push age into a dark cupboard and turn the key, as though it were something too ugly to look upon. We are practically all materialists, not actively scoffing at the things of the spirit, but too busy with the world we know, to have either leisure or inclination to be even vaguely curious as to the world we do not know. So the visible decaying of the body is a haunting horror to us, for we can see in it nothing but unrelieved gloom and tragedy. We want to grasp at life with both hands, and, like the dog in the fable, lose the substance for the shadow. Rightly understood, old age is the happiest time of life, but we overvalue youth and underrate age, and as the world has been making this same mistake for so many thousands of years, it is unlikely that it will be easily converted to any new way of thinking.

We are, by nature, adaptable beings, and, when left alone, men soon learn to accommodate themselves to the slower steps and the newer, graver conditions of life. Old age must take a new mistress, sweet Content, in place of Hope, that limber lass who used to lead us so wild a dance, up hill and down dale, persuading us that we could catch the rays of the sinking sun

and mint them into shining guineas, and who tumbled us at last into a bed of nettles, just as he set, like a dying king, below the horizon line. It is not so with sweet Content. She will sit patiently by our side and never once fret to go a-jaunting, but will be silent with sympathy while we dream our dreams—those wonderful dreams of age, more beautiful by far than the visions of youth that are held in bondage by the very strength of its thews and sinews. She will teach us, too, many lessons if we will but listen; lessons we have had no time to con in the burden and heat of the day, unless we are of those wise ones who let the world go by, and looking into their own hearts learn straightway the mystery of the stars, and of the darkness, and the night, and grow heavy with the weight of strange knowledge. Old age is to them but a farther step on the journey, for the weakening of the body is the strengthening of the spirit; the material world is but part of a dream, sometimes a very evil dream, and to loosen their hold on it can bring them no sorrow.

If happiness is the most desirable of all gifts, then those who live far from the din of life, who have learned in the midst of the busiest street to be alone in a world of the spirit that is full of beauty and quietude, are surely the happiest of people. And old age, more than any other time

of life, can best give us this happiness if we will but accept it. We have learned a truer sense of proportion than was possible in the days of hot-headed youth and midsummer madness, and we know that, for whatever Time took from us he has given us in exchange something far better—for the brightness of the eyes, a deeper knowledge of the heart; for the gaiety and gladness of youth, an understanding sympathy. Old people are often the most delightful of companions, and the world has been a sadder place since we determined to give age the go-by, and pretend that every one is young, or at least merely middle-aged; we should have missed much in life if there had been no old age to help us with its hardly won experience.

Almost before we know it, the time will come when we ourselves shall be counsellor instead of counselled, guide instead of guided. We, too, shall mount that wonderful throne built up of years, of experience, of sorrows, of triumphs, maybe, and take our seat there that we may deliver judgment, offer consolation, be at once prophet, priest and king. The ascent has been gradual and we have gone slowly; now at last the kingdom is ours, and we may sit down and rest us for a little while. Gentle thoughts come to

us as we sit there and look back along the road we have journeyed with tired feet. With infinite travail we have at last learned wisdom, and so the counsels of the old are merciful: Phryne was acquitted on the judgment of the old men. Like a picture the past is spread out before us, and it seems that we have gone back to childhood, for pictures have grown very dear to us. We can understand now much that has often puzzled us, can find out the meaning of much that seemed dark to us, and we feel at last a corner of the veil has been lifted and our dim old eyes may see clearly all that the young eager eyes have missed. The feebleness of our body no longer distresses us; we shall soon have parted from it, and no one wastes time crying over worn-out garments.

> The old eternal spring once more
> Comes back the sad eternal way.

And we have seen many springs. But if some of the gladness has gone, we can still welcome the renewing of the earth, for we, too, are of the earth, and all that is hers is ours. We are soon to leave her, and yet we are not grieved, for we have come to the very gates of knowledge, and must press forward towards that further experi-

ence, the "last adventure" of Pascal, the only possible answer to all the impossible questions of the unquiet spirit within us that has driven us hither and thither, whether we would or no, along the highways of the world.

THE HOUSE OF WISDOM.

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It stands, low-roofed, black-timbered, looking like a miniature model of some mediæval German town, in the very heart and centre of the quiet street, and strangers from all parts of the world stop to wonder how was it possible that life ever stirred behind those curious windows and heavily hung doors. Joining shoulders with the old school and overshadowed by the square solid tower of the church that was at once its origin and guardian, the House of Wisdom tells us of an England that has passed and gone; an England that can never by any possibility come back to us.

But though the centuries lie thick upon it as the folds of a curtain, the house itself is unchanged of purpose since the day when it first left the hands of those old workmen, who all unwittingly bequeathed to us something to wonder at; something of which we speak as of some strange thing —an idyll in stone and timber—though to them it was but part of the day's work, this humble

house made after the fashion of the times. Even in the pride of its youth the House of Wisdom was a sheltering home for old age; for those worthy burgesses with whom the world had not gone over-well, so that at last they were glad to seek its shelter and claim their rightful dole from the willing hands, maybe of that first lady warden of whom we now know nothing save her name. Perhaps with her, too, life had not gone well, and so she cloaked herself with charity, as many another has done since, and came to make her home among the old pensioners who, be sure, would treat her with due courtesy and deference, because she was of gentle birth. Or else, life had gone pleasantly with her, and she had spent her days in far distant cities, pleasure-getting and pleasure-seeking, until at last the heavy years, creeping slowly and silently on, had made of themselves a menacing figure come to warn her that she was nearing her winter-time and had better make her peace with heaven before at last the shadows closed round her. And so either by the way of poverty or penitence she came to the new house, to keep watch and ward among those old people for whose sake it had been built, and prayed with them in the adjoining chapel where the frescoes and carvings were as bright and fresh as the beams

and rafters of the room through whose windows she could look out upon the quiet street and wonder at the strange sense of peace old age can bring with it.

It is this same strange sense of peace that hangs round the old house to-day, and the reason is, or so I think, because, unlike other old houses, it has never known a childhood; has never watched the beginning of life or even the strength of its upgrowth, but instead has seen the gradual decay of the body and the struggle of the soul to set itself free from the gaoler who has held it over-long in bondage. Of all else that goes to make the sum of man's experience the old house knows nothing; it is ignorant alike of ambitions or triumphs, of the strivings for applause or the irksome toil of bread-winning; for life—as most of us understand it—has ended for these old pensioners who have come to stay here awhile. If the door opens, their eyes turn towards it with a certain wistfulness, as though in expectation of some guest who has made too long a tarrying, but of whose coming they have no doubt; a guest whose footfall has been heard often, whose face has looked into every room in turn, and who has seldom failed of a welcome. For the House of Wisdom stands, as it were, at the very end of the journey; it is the last of the halting-stages, and

the travellers are all of them tired people who have come by many different roads to rest themselves before they set their faces towards the unknown country of every man's desire. So many have rested here before them, waiting for the guest whose coming, however long delayed, is certain, that there is a sense as of a hidden presence in the low-raftered rooms with their blackened beams towards which so many eyes have turned when at last the presence was made visible. We leave life outside in the air and the sunshine, for the men and women in the House of Wisdom have had their fill of it, and are now looking forward to fresh experiences. Here, they must part with the last of their luggage, and their spirits pass to the green fields of legend or the heaven of belief, for each one of them will, maybe, give a different name to the place where he is going. As you sit and talk with them it is possible to realise what a man feels who must needs be content to sit and wait for death. A waiting-time tries the patience of most of us, but these old people are not impatient. Neither are they afraid. A little curious most of them; a little sad some of them; a little regretful all of them for that lumber of the body grown dear to them through so many years of use and close companionship; but yet unhappy, no one of them.

It is Leonardo da Vinci who says, "Small rooms or dwellings set the mind in the right path," and he did not speak in idle fashion. For the small room is dear to the scholar for the very reason that by its narrowness and limitation of space it compels him to concentration of thought: when the mind would wander, the eye is brought back by the nearness of the four walls of the little room to the page of the book, and the mind follows the eye. And so when long ago men built the House of Wisdom, some such idea as this must have helped in the making of their plans and the drawing of their measures. For all the rooms are small, as though to teach the travellers who are waiting here awhile the vanity of the great possessions for which men strive in the active outside world; the raftered ceilings are low, as if to tell them that they may not any more raise their eyes towards the manifold prizes of life, but must now be content to own themselves failures; the windows give but little light, for the men and women who sit by the chimney-corners have no further need of books, being wise with the lessons that, whether they would or no, the travelling years have taught them.

As I pass out from the heavy sunshine of a long summer afternoon into the softened light of one of these shadow-haunted rooms, I know that I

have come into a new and strange world. For here, as in some fairy legend, the clocks have stopped, time itself has ceased, and the old woman with the bright eyes who sits and talks with me must have been laid long ago under an enchantment by some kindly magician, so far apart is she with her gentle dreamings and her simple courtesies from the life of to-day, or even of yesterday. To her the House of Wisdom has grown very dear, and she speaks of her one small room as a man will sometimes speak of the well-loved home of his youth. Above all are the blackened beams true and tried friends with whom she will find it hard to part when at last the time comes to say good-bye, but she comforts herself with the fancy that many in that long procession of the outworn, the halt, and the feeble who have lived here before her must, too, have found the parting hard.

"They seem so friendly like," she explains, "and I lie and think of all the eyes that have lain awake, when the fire was shining on winter nights, and looked up at them just as I do now. Why, I can read all my life written there as plain as if 'twere in a printed book, and they must have seen their lives too, poor souls, and the ones before them, and so right on to the beginning. Now, it's wonderful how fond I've grown of that old

beam up in the corner. I never feel lonesome so long as I look up at him and think of all he knows. I've had a long life—seventy-eight years ; but what is my life when all is said? The beam was here when this house was built ; he has seen a many come and a many go, and I say to myself, how many more will he see?" Her eyes, wise with the weight of years, looked up at the friendly wood as if it were some human thing, for she herself, with her dreams and her fancies, has grown to be a part of the old building, having come to it by right as to a dower-house. Her home was only a mile or more away—"if you go by the footpath across the meadows"—and even in those long-ago courting days of which she speaks with wistful tenderness, she had ever seen, as in a vision, the House of Wisdom waiting for her with the welcome of an opening door. Perhaps she had always known that she was not one who would make what is vulgarly called a success in life, and it was for such gentle poverty that the old house was builded. As she talked on in the soft, level voice of age, her husband lay sleeping, under the friendly beam, in the bed from which he will never rise. He has worked hard at a humble trade, yet he owns a name that is known in English history.

Though all the pensioners have brought some-

thing of their own individual character and personality into the rooms of which they are the life tenants, yet the house is more powerful than they, and even the malcontents are touched with a reverent sense of the dignity of their surroundings. All are proud of their right of residence, proud of the inconveniences and oddities of the taste of a bye-gone age. Outside the old house they are, possibly, but very ordinary men and women ; but inside, with the sure support of the inheritance of a background of centuries, they have learned at least to counterfeit a gracious bearing and to give to the stranger a most courteous greeting. As I go from room to room I am struck afresh with this gravity of demeanour, this heritage of a statelier past, that these men and women wear as a uniform, and passing out at last into the quiet garden that lies under the shadow of the grey church—a garden divided up into many plots, so that all who are here may still grow their favourite flowers—I begin to wonder would it not be well if, for rich and poor alike, a House of Wisdom should be built ; a house it should be no shame to enter, but to which we could turn when the working days were well-nigh over, whether those days had been crowned with success or embittered by failure. Our ingoing should take the form of an impressive ceremony,

for it would symbolise the good-bye to the life active, and the entrance into the life contemplative. When the doors had closed upon us and we were left alone in the small room with only our thoughts for companions, we should be like neophytes undergoing initiation into the hidden mysteries of some new and strange religion. The active life, made up of working days that were linked together into a seemingly endless stretch of to-morrows, would then be over and done with, not of necessity but of our own free-will.

For I would not have us wait until the very end before beginning this new life of ours, but go as soon as we find ourselves tiring of the old—when the salt has almost lost its savour; when the grasshopper, not yet a burden, has ceased to be a joy; when the windows, not wholly darkened, can let in but a saddening twilight. Then will we leave the old experiences and seek the new; will take our place among the veterans, and sitting down by the fire, learn to wait resolutely and without fear for the guest who can now make no long tarrying. Youth will come sometimes to see us, flitting in and out like swallows in the sun as do the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren of these old men and women; but the home will not be for them, and when they go we shall not feel lonely, for we shall look at life with changed eyes

—the wiser eyes of experienced travellers. Sometimes we may help the younger ones with our warnings, our counsels, and our pack of lately learned knowledge. But not often. For as we in our heyday went boldly along the road seeking out our own by-paths, so they, too, will surely do the same. Besides, we shall have matters of far higher import to fill the measure of our days, for the sense of the nearness of the shadow will never leave us, as it never leaves those who have made their home in the House of Wisdom. The ruling, though unseen, presence, it comes even into the brightness of the garden and mingles with the almost overpowering scent of the lilies that droop in the great heat of the long afternoon; and as I dream of this new house that I would build, it seems as though the old house were mocking me, telling me it knows the secret, has found the answer to the riddle, because it has ever been the home of those who are crowned with the wisdom of age.

"Build your house," it seems to say; "but build it as you will, it must be long indeed before it can hold for any the peace I hold, or teach to any the lessons I can teach. There must be many comings and many goings before the walls will speak as mine can speak; the guest must visit it often before it will learn half the secrets that

I know. Build this new house of yours and fill it with the old, the worn and the feeble; but it will be long before the years hang it round with mystery or curtain it with peace." I did not remind the old house it, too, had had a beginning in the days of its youth and inexperience; for, like the old people themselves, it had forgotten that it was ever anything but the House of Wisdom at which men pause to look and wonder. An old man came up to me, moving slowly between the beds of tall lilies, and began to talk. It was a good place to live in, a very good place. He had lived in many homes and this was his last, and he liked it the best of them all. For, now the "Black Ox was treading on his toes," it was best to be with the old folk, because the young ones did not understand the ways of that most strange and unlovely beast.

"But they will know his tread one of these days," he said in a voice, part triumphant, part regretful; "yes, they will know it sure enough. Why, I said to a little lad only the other morning when he mocked at me because I was walking so feeble and slow, Laugh away, laugh away. You have helped drive many a poor beast to the slaughter—he works for the butcher up the street—but one day the Black Ox will come and drive you. He didn't laugh so loud then, I can tell you."

Looking at his clear eye and resolute mouth, I thought the Black Ox had trodden lightly, alike on this man with his end-of-the-journey philosophy, and the woman with her dreams and fancies, thus proving himself a kindly beast, more friend than foe. When I, too, am fain to seek the shelter of a House of Wisdom, may he tread as lightly, as softly and as friendly-wise on me.

DEATH AND TRANSFIGURATION.

DEATH AND TRANSFIGURATION.

Long before we grow old we begin to have a nodding acquaintance with Death; he meets us at unexpected turns, and rubs much of the brightness off the face of the world. We learn that here is a force to be reckoned with, something that—whether we like it or no—we cannot afford to ignore when we are busy sketching out our gaily coloured maps of the future, though we dismiss it from our thoughts as far as is possible, and any one dwelling overmuch on death is said to be morbid-minded. For we of to-day are so eager in our pursuit of life that we have almost forgotten its inevitable ending. This we put on one side, while we busy ourselves in searching out the secret of being, the essence of matter, giving a name to every nerve and a reasoned explanation for every passing thought. We no longer have any patience with mystery or the unknown, but want instead to draw out as exact a chart of our minds as of our bodies; and death, with its silence, its impenetrability, and its cold reality, is still, for all

our pretence of knowledge, a mystery that baffles the wisest among us.

Science has recently spoken with authority from the depths of an easy-chair, complacently putting an end to all further controversy by an appeal to the results gained through experiments euphemistically described as "investigations of Nature":—

"Is it, then, necessary to suppose that a something, an essence, a spirit, an intangible existence called 'life' or 'vitality,' or the *anima animans*, passes away, or, as it were, evaporates from a thing which was living and now is dead? Assuredly no more than it is necessary to suppose that an essence or thing called 'death' takes possession of it when it ceases to carry on the changes which we call 'living'. It must not be supposed that we regard the unique and truly awe-inspiring processes which go on in the protoplasm of living things as something simple, easily understood and accounted for, because we have given up the notion that life is an entity which enters into living things from without and escapes from them at death. The real fact is, that the notion of 'spirits,' whether of a lower or a higher kind, supposed to enter into and 'affect' various natural objects, including trees, rivers, and mountains, as well as animals and man, does not help us, and only stands in the way of our gaining more com-

plete knowledge of natural processes. When we say that life and even its most tremendous outcome—the mind of man—are to be studied and their gradual development traced as part of the orderly unfolding of natural processes, we are no whit less reverent, in no degree less impressed by the wonder, immensity, and mystery of the universe, than those who, with happy and obstinate adherence to primitive conceptions, think they can explain things by calling up vital essences and wandering spirits."

As I read this definite statement of the new faith, I wondered what old Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist, would have found to say to it. His elaborate treatise on *The Immortality of the Soul*, with its weighty arguments as to the exact nature of spirits and their power of assuming familar shapes that their friends may know them again, though excellent reading, would seem to the scientist as the veriest folly ; while to the old writer the new creed would sound like the crackling of thorns under a pot. That spirits do not appear oftener More explains to his own complete satisfaction by the suggestion that possibly they "without some violence done to their own nature cannot become visible ; it being haply as troublesome a thing to them to keep themselves in one steady visible consistency in the air as it is for men that

dive to hold their breath in the water." Less than three centuries divides the two thinkers, while the arguments for and against man's immortality are old as the speech of man ; but to-day science is the accepted teacher, and those of us who object to what are said to be reasoned facts are no longer burnt at the stake, we are merely laughed at.

This is no new theory that science has to offer, for long ages ago was it not written by Callimachus on the tombstone of Charidas of Cyrene that the underworld is "a great darkness, the resurrection a lie, we perish utterly"? But there is this difference : when the author of *The Immortality of the Soul* wrote at leisure with whole-hearted conviction, few people had the courage to deny the soul's existence, while to-day few will be found with the courage to express even a half-hearted belief in the existence of life as a "separate entity" ; men accept the dogma of negation—possibly with regret, but they accept it. Setting an extravagant value on life itself, a value out of all due proportion to its worth, they devote more thought and care to the preservation of the body than to the cultivation of the virtues ; for the body is no longer held to be the crumbling temple of the God that dwells within us, but the God and the temple in one. Thus it behoves us to make the well-being of the body our foremost care ; it

is all we have, says Science, and when it dies, we perish utterly. If it is a question of argument science is triumphant, for the physical side of death admits of no dispute. After the last breath has been drawn all that was dear to us becomes inert matter, and we hasten to hide away "the body's coloured pride" in the earth or else consume it with fire, before that awful change shall begin, and what was lovely be turned into what is loathsome; and where is now the thing we called life?

It is such an old question that one is half ashamed of repeating it. And yet each time we watch the act of the Great Mystery, consciously or unconsciously we say to ourselves the prayer of the Emperor Hadrian, that most beautiful rendering into words of the eternal longing:—

> Little soul, little wanderer, dear enticer!
> Guest and companion of the body . . .
> Into what regions wilt thou now go away?

But the quarrel that is older than history has of late changed a little. There is no longer any dispute as to where we are going, for the new teachers tell us there is nothing to go. The old creeds professed that man was in himself a trinity, body, soul and spirit; but we have learned better, and need not fear that our unquiet ghosts will ever come back to warn the living of the inde-

structibility of conscious life. Yet I think the world has been a duller as well as a sadder place since it refused to believe in the possibility of a heaven, and laid down as a fixed rule that we must only credit what can be proved by an appeal to the senses, saying with the children of the Wise Man in the Morality "There is nothing we cannot see; nothing we cannot touch." It was the cry of Thomas called Didymus and is a very human cry, for while the body is ours to handle and to hold, the spirit lies beyond our power of vision. The training that seeks to discover the secret of life through destroying life, will not help us here; but "a happy and obstinate adherence to primitive conceptions" may strengthen our sight and show us more stars in the sky.

"In art," says Leonardo da Vinci, "we may be said to be grandsons to God," and art has always thought of death as an actual presence, some one we shall meet face to face who will set us upon the one journey that the least travelled among us is sure of taking. Hideously grotesque as was the mediæval conception of death, this sense of personality was never lost; the conquering knight, the player on the virginals whose bony fingers are finding the perfect harmony, the strange nurse rocking the cradle, all are alike the messenger come with an invitation we may not

refuse. According to their various fancies, men came to look upon death as the angel of consolation, the easer of burdens, or as the cruel master who took them from the green gladness of the earth before they were ready or willing to leave it; and passionate prayers were prayed by some that he might stay his hand, by some that he might come quickly and loose the ties binding the impatient soul to the laggard body. Science has brushed all this aside. Death, it says truly, is the natural process of decay, and the desire for immortality merely an expression of our natural vanity that cannot bear to think we perish with our bodies. The quarrel has ever been the same between the "grandsons of God" and those whose curious minds must prove to demonstration before belief is possible to them. Now as all curiosity is a little vulgar, while faith is a part of the reticence that is the highest courtesy, it comes to pass that art to-day has but few disciples, science many, and to speak of death as an intermediary between one phase of our personal lives and another is held to be at best foolishness and childish perversity.

I have used the words Death and Transfiguration for a title to this essay because the first time I heard Richard Strauss's "Tod und Verklärung" I understood that it was possible to explain through music something more than the seeming finality

of death, or the feeble fluttering of the soul's wings, half uncertain whether it can ever reach to a heaven. For here, though we have death dominant and irresistible, though the man with his dreams of the joyful days of his youth and the struggles and accomplishment of his manhood, is beaten and conquered, yet here too is the triumph of the transfiguration. It is told out in the orchestra by the brass, and not without purpose, for the trumpet has ever been reckoned the instrument of triumph; the walls of Jericho fell at the sound of trumpets, and the earth itself shall crumble to pieces, says John of the Great Vision, to the wail of one long trumpet blast. There is no lack of triumph in the Transfiguration *motif* in Strauss's "tone-poem," but it is this recognition of a triumph after, not over, death that, all apart from its beauty, makes the music remarkable, and far better worth hearing than a waggon-load of sermons. For music is the common speech of Paradise and the tongue of angels, and when Dante was fain to cross the stream that wound about the fields of the *Paradiso Terrestre*, was not Matilda singing while she gathered her handfuls of bright flowers? It is the transfiguration that has been lost sight of to-day in all our dealings with death, and it is strange that the master who more than any other

has developed the science of music should have expressed better than any other the wonder and the beauty of this welding of life with life. Yet perhaps it is not so strange, for all art must of necessity interpret not only the mind of the artist, but the minds of those who live in his times ; and though the old creeds are said to be dying and the new still in swathing bands, the longing to triumph over death is surely set deep as ever in the hidden heart of man.

If we want to understand something about death it is best to leave the scientists and philosophers and the knowledgeable men alone (for they have nothing to tell us that is new and but little that is wise) and go into the country and talk with simple people who have lived all their lives so near to the earth that they have no unreasoning fear of one day lying under it. For there is a folk-lore of death that is worth our study, and a language known only to the untutored, simple as the speech of love, to which those who have been trained in the knowledge learned of books are sometimes glad to turn when the Shadow draws near to them. Whatever men may pretend, death is as easily understood of the foolish as the wise, and no one pair of eyes can pierce the darkness better than another ; we must ourselves experience death before we can speak

with authority, and when we know, the time for speech has passed. Socrates himself when he faced his judges could find nothing better to say than this—"The time has come for us to depart —I to die, you to live. Which of us is going to the better lot, God alone clearly knows." He was heavy with knowledge, and for this his enemies caused him to die, yet he only weighed the two possibilities, the eternal unbroken sleep or the soul's journey to another world; just as may to-day some foolish man who has no learning, but has watched others die. Again Socrates said, "If the traditional belief be true that all the dead are there, what blessing could be greater than this, O my judges?" He held the scales with a steady hand; if he did not believe with Hamlet that "dreams may come," he did not roughly brush aside the traditional belief as do the teachers of to-day, but was content to wait for the answer, seeing that it was so near.

It is the people living far from cities, yet brought often in touch with death, who have kept close the traditions of this folk-lore; sailors and fishermen, miners, or shepherds whose flocks feed on lonely hills, have mostly a deep-rooted belief in the reality of the world that we cannot see and cannot touch; and if they are a little shy of telling the strange things they have known, when at last

they speak it sounds like truth. They are untroubled by any doubt whether the soul retains its memory after the shock of parting from the body, for do not more than half their stories tell how the spirit still keeps so much of the earth-love that at first it comes back often to its old home as a wounded bird to the nest?—and those of us who have never seen a spirit and would be even a little afraid if we met with one on a dark night at the turn of the road, forget to question when the speaker is full of faith. Perhaps if we read the same story between the covers of a book we should think it a poor one and hardly worth the telling; it gains its force through the suggestion, passed from the ignorant mind into our own, that in the matter of this greatest mystery of all we are still but as children who think the world is held between the green walls of their garden hedge. Science and learning, while recognising that death is the one indisputable truth, have always shrugged incredulous shoulders when brought face to face with the larger world that lies beyond the hedge; the world that ever since the beginning of time has been the hope of the dreamer and the actual possession of many an ignorant man. For the very language we use is borrowed from the speech of the people we affect to despise. We say "He is gone" when

the last breath leaves the body, though science has been busy teaching us that nothing can go because this story of the soul and the spirit is only one of the legends of the nursery believed in when we and the world were young. Yet when we ourselves are watching the coming of that awful change to a face we love, our hearts cry out that the nursery tale is true and the spirit, whether fearful or triumphant, has gone like a brave explorer to carve its fortune anew in a happier country.

Though temperament may be more responsible for faith or unfaith than heredity, the Anglo-Saxon blood generates a certain scepticism that is fully aware of its own nakedness. "For thee was a house built before thou wast born," chanted to a dreary measure the old Anglo-Saxon poet, and then went on to tell how "The heel-ways are low, the side-ways unhigh" of this house that was planned "for thee, ere thou of mother camest". Every sorry detail of death is dear to him, and though in another poem the reunion of the soul with the body is foretold after "three hundred winters" of separation, we feel there is but little belief in this promised meeting of the old companions, and less desire; instead he would rather dwell untroubled in the low-timbered house. Only one poet has made friends with death and

written with as sure and as absolute a certainty of knowledge of the unseen world as travellers do of the cities and plains of some known country. Yet even Dante, drawing his maps with conscious care, is not wholly satisfying. From his conception of the *Inferno* the most hardened devil might shrink; the *Purgatorio* is the dream of a stern mediæval priest; it is only in the *Paradiso* that we breathe real air and know he is at last showing us some part of the beauty of the Eternal Truth. "To the high fantasy here power failed," and the vision was past recalling. But he had seen the scattered leaves of the Universe "bound by love in one volume" and understood, in that one moment, the mystery of life that some call the mystery of death. Yet I doubt whether more people have not found comfort in John's vision that in Dante's, for the simplest words are the words we remember best, and the fisherman's haven of heaven sounds like home.

"I begin through the grass once again to be bound to the Lord"; so sings a poet who is still with us, and this one line seems to me to hold all the truth of the great mystery. When the most beautiful woman of our time lay a-dying, she often asked to have this poem read to her, finding in it more of comfort than in the words of greater masters. She was going back to the earth

in the fulness of youth, and it must have been hard to part with so great a loveliness as was hers, but she learned that this was the only possible gate of knowledge, and if she would be wise she must pass through it; and, they say, she died with a glad heart, having heard the earth call to her. For the story of a resurrection is the oldest truth of all, but perhaps it is easier of belief when we live in the country and can watch for ourselves the wonder of the change. We have heard of it often, it is the commonest, most exhausted of similes; but it is when we are face to face with it, a very part of it, that we learn to understand, as the dying woman did, that if we would inherit our kingdom we, too, must "begin through the grass once again to be bound to the Lord". It is a wonder of which we can never tire. This is the singing month, and now my forest is green and full of birds; the copper beeches have not lost their first vivid red, the lilac is still in flower, the chestnut buds are breaking, and at night the moon is almost hidden, for the branches of the great elms are set about so thick with leaves. Yet it is but a short time, as we count busy days, since I looked through the window and saw the white trees set like a background for the old painter's scene of the Nativity. And because, while the wood has been waking, I have

been through a deep sorrow, it seemed as though all the beauty had gone from my forest and I could see, beyond the tall trees, nothing but the shadow and the darkness of death.

But the earth is true to her promise, and even sad hearts forego their heaviness, though maybe for a moment only, in watching the gladness of the growing spring. We have planted much that was precious, and the Book that promised us "a glad and joyful resurrection" is not to-day the unquestioned authority it once was said to be, for we have sought other and duller teachers. Yet in spite of our doubt we can, if we will, still see if not the risen Lord, the risen life, and slowly, half ashamed, we begin to mistrust our own unfaith. We know nothing; we have forsaken the old guides and have but little love for the new; so we turn again to the older wisdom and seek to learn of the simple what the men who are filled with book-lore cannot teach us. And the simple tell us many strange things: how death itself is but a call, and when the spirit hears, it is constrained to leave the body and to follow; and the bending of the body in old age is the call of the earth drawing back unto itself that which is its own, so there is no choice left for the two travelling companions but to part, whether they be willing or unwilling. The restlessness of death

comes only from the strain of listening, for the voice that calls is often a loved voice, long silent but never forgotten, and the poor body, hearing, tries, however feebly, to arise and go. Last of all, the transfigured look that comes in dying eyes before they close into a long forgetfulness is a reflection of the wonders of the beauty of the vision that has been granted to them.

Such is the wisdom of the wayside, and we affect to despise it until the shadows begin to lengthen and we find no longer any comfort in the assurance of knowledge or the vanity of learning. There was once a man who searched out the very heart and core of death, and his words are still read over nearly every body laid to rest in our graveyards. Before he was Paul, the preacher of the resurrection, he was Saul of Tarsus, skilled in the lore of the Talmud and the mystery of the Cabala, secret wisdom hidden from the beginning of time because it was too precious to be known of any save those who were worthy to receive it. To him by the wayside came a vision and smote him blind, and in that darkness he learned a greater truth, and so he wrote of death as no man ever wrote of it before, as no man will ever write of it again. The unknown, unnamed author of the book of the Wisdom of Solomon had said of the dead, "In

the sight of the unwise they seemed to die". These must have been familiar words to Saul of Tarsus, and he remembered them when he wrote of the transfiguration, "Behold, I tell you a mystery . . . We shall all be changed".

To-day we are the unwise. We cannot see beyond the "seeming to die," and even of those who still cling to the faith of Galilee many have given up all belief in the resurrection of the body, that, it has been said, shall rise again in a state of youth. The earth dies, the body dies, we are but as shadows in a world of shadows. Yet by the wayside, to the simple the vision still comes, so that it seems to them easy to believe in, if not to understand, so mighty a change as shall even make possible the resurrection of our perished bodies.

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